

THE CASE FOR
THE DEFENDANT



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LITTLE, BROWN, AND
COMPANY

BOSTON



1929

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Published March, 1929

Reprinted March, 1929

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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IN Saumur, a small town on the banks of the Loire, there was, in the days of Louis Philippe, one of those cavalry schools in which officers of the French cavalry, detached for the time being from their regiments, underwent a course of higher instruction. Among those who were assembled there at the end

of July 1835 was Lieutenant de la Roncière, of the 1st Lancers. The other officers were looking forward to the surprise of encounters with old acquaintances, but their anticipation was not shared by the lieutenant. He would much rather have met none of his old acquaintances, though, as matters stood, there could be no question of this. It seemed to him, therefore, that he was favoured by fortune, in that he escaped, after all, with no more than a vigorous greeting from little Ambert, with whom he had served in the Dragoons. As a matter of fact, he was accustomed to rather different treatment from the many who knew him; they were given to pointing him out as one of those fellows of whom everyone tried to get rid after a little while, and who, at the age of twenty-nine, was still only a lieutenant, "although a man of good family." Sooner or later everyone came to hear of him.

Emil de la Roncière was the youngest son of a general. He had grown up in Paris, though the family was of Belgian origin. A brother of his father was the proprietor of one of the largest diamond-cutting establishments in Belgium, in the neighbourhood of Gand. One of Emil's brothers, the second son, had been brought up by his uncle, so that Emil scarcely

knew him; and he knew as little of his eldest brother, who was already grown up when Emil was a child. He was a painter, and lived somewhere on the coast. Suzanne, the youngest but one of the family, was the only person for whom he felt any brotherly affection. He grew up at home with her and his mother, while the father was almost continually in the field—with Napoleon, as the children were well aware. This state of affairs was unchanged until Emil was about ten years of age, when his father returned home. He had been promoted to colonel, and had lost his left arm. Now he remained at home, even when he returned to active service under a new ruler—who might just as well have been the old one as far as he was concerned—despite his empty sleeve, which he carried tucked into his coat pocket. It seemed to Emil later as though an almost uninterrupted series of unprofitable disputes and provocations, which began about this time, were in some mysterious way connected with this empty sleeve, for he could not remember that he had ever seen his father without it. But his painful memories began, or so at least it seemed to him in later life, with an incident which impressed itself indelibly on the boy, and from which he dated his acquaintance with his father.

Not long after his return and the restoration of the Bourbons the Colonel was promoted to General, and shortly afterwards Emil, who by this time was a sturdy youngster of twelve, discovered, in a corner of his parents' bedroom, a picture which he had never before seen elsewhere in the house. It was a portrait in oils of his father, almost as large as life, which was indeed not saying very much, for M. de la Roncière was a man of very mean physique. In the portrait he stood erect, in the warlike posture of the charge; his little right hand was brandishing his sabre, while his left sleeve fluttered empty; in the ardour of battle his helmet must have fallen, for the General appeared bareheaded, his otherwise bald crown surrounded by a halo of grey hair, which was here shown waving in the breeze.

At the sight of this painting, in which the boy became absorbed, he was suddenly seized, for reasons which were not altogether clear even to himself, with a wild desire to laugh. For a few moments he wrestled with himself, and then burst into joyful shouts of laughter, over which he immediately lost all control. Even when his father entered the room it was in vain that he tried to stammer some explanation. The General gazed at his son in consternation; his

attempts to speak were constantly stifled by fits of sobbing and bleating laughter. Beside the insignificant figure of the father, who scarcely overtopped him, the hale and hearty youngster looked like the offspring of a giant, and of this the General was most painfully conscious. With the stick that he had recently been carrying in the house he thumped upon the floor, but Emil's attempts to control himself were of little avail. Then the General's head suddenly flushed crimson; his thin lips, on which bubbles of saliva appeared, moved silently, and he angrily raised and shook his stick; and even as Emil ducked his head and escaped from the room he saw that his father was gripping his stick in the middle, and that he was standing in a peculiar position, with his toes turned in and touching one another.

He was quite unable to forget the whole scene, and this was in many ways unfortunate. Moreover, these convulsive fits of laughter recurred more than once during the following years, although less violently, and in respect of a particular cause: directly his parents began to quarrel. As regards the General, he was always cross-grained after his return home, and he really seemed to think that by losing his arm he had purchased a right to be ill-tempered for the

rest of his life. He was never tired of repeating how it had been his dream, after a life full of hardships, to retire on his pension at the age of fifty, and to devote himself to the intellectual interests which he alleged himself to possess; and how he was compelled by unfavourable circumstances to continue his military service. Such complaints were confined to the bosom of his family, for in the outer world they might have been understood as intimations of a nature which Emil at first interpreted, with joyful satisfaction, as the complaints of a man who, like so many others, had seen his star sink with that of the great Emperor. This, however, was not the case. For M. de la Roncière the only thing that mattered was the fact that he had lost part of his fortune, and was thus deprived of the life of meditation which had formerly hovered before his eyes, and which was to have begun with his fiftieth year. Emil was unable to conceive of a life of activity lived with such a purpose, a purpose to be fulfilled at an appointed time; and with the harsh judgment of youth he regarded his father's allusions to a life given to the arts and sciences as so much empty talk. He took the liberty of making the objection that Napoleon, for example, amidst all his extraordinary accomplishments in his

own especial province, had found time, amongst other things, to concern himself with such matters as the Rue de Rivoli; whereupon the General reproved him for his pertness. Emil was well accustomed to his taking refuge behind the convention of the superiority of the adult; directly he was at a loss for an answer he took up the position that it was not worth his while to argue with a child. This wounded Emil, whose sense of justice bordered even then on insanity, and provoked him to indulge in a certain rather startling mode of expression, a scornful dexterity of speech, which was peculiar to him, and which, as he had long ago discovered, provoked his father more than anything. He would have been quite ready to desist at the price of an admission, even unspoken, of his personal worth, but this his father did not understand; probably because he had no conception whatever of the boy's motives and feelings.

When he was fourteen he took refuge one day with his mother, who was given to indulging him, so that he did not think it becoming to take her side too strongly. He made it clear to her that he could not help regarding almost everything that grown-up persons, in their dealings with one another, took as a matter of course as absurd and repugnant to com-

mon sense; and, moreover, that in all she said and did there was almost always a concealed as well as an apparent motive; she was like that handbox with a double bottom which his brother (who was already travelling for his adoptive father, the diamond-merchant) had smilingly shown him at the time of his last visit—but he had been disgusted with the thing. “There are people,” he said in conclusion, “who live as they do because they couldn’t do otherwise—I mean, live otherwise than well; and there are others who live just the same sort of life, but only because that is how ‘people’ live.” He was afraid that he had not expressed himself intelligibly, and when he saw his mother concealing a smile he suddenly felt hopeful, and was conscious of a warmth at his heart, for he was quite ready to submit himself to a maturer judgment; but it had been only an idle smile, and its secret quality was merely affectation, as he plainly saw; for his mother simply proceeded to fondle her darling, delighted with his clever chatter. Moreover, soon after this he was the witness of a dispute between his parents, during which his mother, in loud, caustic tones, and without a moment’s hesitation, informed his father that he too was merely one of those hypocrites who do things

only because "people" do them, and say things only because "people" say them, and not because they have any real convictions. Emil, who was trying in a corner of the room to suppress his convulsive laughter, fell suddenly silent, and blushed scarlet. On this occasion he had not drawn attention to himself and was not turned out of the room, but slipped out of it of his own accord.

This quarrel between his parents, like so many of their recent quarrels, turned on the extravagance with which the General reproached his wife, while she accused him of hypochondria, and complained that he himself squandered money on unessentials. He retorted that he had to keep up appearances, that there were things which he owed to his rank.—No one hindered him from doing so, though for that matter no one but himself can have been impressed by the conspicuous brilliance of his position. He had been retained in the service and had been promoted to the rank of General—of Lieutenant-General, just so that he could call himself a General—and that was as far as he would go. It was probable that the new Court had done so much for him only because it did not wish to make an enemy of anyone, and assuredly not of him; and if it wished to conciliate him,

this was only because of the influence he might have in his own country—the Court had always an eye on the Belgians. The General stood speechless. He laid his hand, with its carefully trimmed finger-nails, on his breast, murmuring: “So an old soldier must allow such things to be said to him after thirty years of service!” But Madame, whose wits were sharpened by her malignity, retorted coldly that he might as well spare her that old song, and that it was high time that he realized that in these days a man who was always chopping and changing between self-satisfaction over his own performances and a self-conscious humility was good for nothing at all. And there she hit the mark.

She was not always in the right, but was often the actual cause of their dissensions. It is possible that during his continued absence she had grown unaccustomed to allowing for his presence in the house. For a long sequence of years she had managed things in her own comfortable way, and was now either unwilling or unable to meet the demands which would be made upon her by the kind of household that he wished her to maintain. There had been no talk of anything of the kind when they married, or the bride would perhaps have drawn back in alarm; she was of

middle-class origin, and had always been inclined to a self-tormenting under-estimation of her own abilities. This tendency, moreover, had become intensified since an incident that had seemed to be merely amusing and without any deep significance. It so happened that she was told one day how she had come by her Christian name. The last of eleven children, when she was about to be baptized her parents were for the moment at a loss for a suitable name. Her father, however, wasted no time in thinking. "What is the maid's name?" he cried. "Marie," he was told, and thereupon he decided that she too should be called Marie, and so it was done. Thus it was that the daughter of the country doctor, on whom Lieutenant de la Roncière was at one time billeted, came by her name. And when she learned this, after years of a prosperous marriage, it intensified the sense of her own inferiority, which had, in the beginning, pleased the young husband, for he had seen in it only a touching humility, but to which she continually made melancholy references. In later years, whenever M. de la Roncière returned from his campaigning, he was forced to realize that this peculiarity was becoming aggravated; a sort of moody impenetrability, which at one time had the power of fascinating him,

gave place to the most exaggerated sensitiveness, which was ill to live with; and little by little his wife developed a distressing restlessness and a causeless depression which alternated with bursts of superfluous energy. When the husband at last returned home for good he found a little corpulent woman who deliberately neglected her outward appearance, and who, after the age of forty, became each year more full of whims and crotchets, which were not only irritating but ridiculous. It pleased her to pour contempt upon anything that was offered her, and to regard those about her, and, above all, the General, with suspicion and disdain. She had become terribly obstinate, and from time to time she exercised a despotic rule over her exhausted family. For example, she declared one day that new bread was unhealthy, that stale bread alone was wholesome, and for weeks she compelled her husband and children to eat stale crusts. Her passion for mystification, which was one of her oldest failings and the cause of many wrangles, was finally brought to a head by a crazy fear of burglars, which inspired her with the idea of affixing to the front of the house, in order to frighten them away, a board with a pointing hand and the inscription "Gendarme ici,"

which the horrified General afterwards removed in secret. But the prodigal housekeeping with which he reproached her was not unconnected with her spasmodic desire to do more than was asked of her, to thrust herself forward. She would contrive dishes that required all sorts of expensive ingredients, and which, when prepared, no one could eat. Then followed lamentations from the exasperated cook; and the household was repeatedly left without servants, for Mme de la Roncière tried to make up for her extravagance by unmercifully stinting her staff. The eldest son, who had been recalled to Paris for reasons of economy, did not come home at meal-times in these troublous periods, but cooked his food for himself in the studio which he had rented in the neighbourhood; and for this his mother hated him.

She loved no one but Emil. Him she idolized, and plagued him with her worship; for not only was his mother's fawning tenderness irksome to the half-grown boy, but he found her constant care for his health importunate; her continual fear lest "something should happen to him" restricted his liberty of movement, and the radical manner in which she courted his favour offended his honesty. She did not hesitate to describe his father's com-

mands as mistaken, if not preposterous; "and what business was it of his?" Emil, of course, was quite alive to his mother's lack of sense, but then there was so much else in her behaviour that annoyed him; and although he had no difficulty in resisting the temptation to profit by the advantage which this gave him, his detestation of his father's pretentious character inclined him to be unjust, and this tendency dismayed and confused him. To be sure, his mother herself had little regard for appearances; she persisted in wearing a skirt and jacket of a stuff which looked as though it had never had any particular colour, and a flat cap which had been washed innumerable times. Nevertheless, she was, to a certain extent, consistent in her eccentricities. If the General exhorted her to give up making her own clothes she invariably wept as though she had been insulted; but if Emil gave her the same advice her reply was: "Let me be, my boy, it amuses me." And whenever guests appeared she used to take the old ladies aside—she already regarded herself as an old woman, and as far as her appearance went she was by now justified in so doing—and many of the young men, who took her quite seriously, and told them her troubles. This, of course, was most painful and em-

barrassing; but there was no ambiguity even in her mystifications. The General, on the other hand, took pains to appear irreproachable to the outer world, indulging his senile churlishness only in the bosom of his family; and this enraged Emil, since he regarded it as a sign of contempt.

But as a man dependent on the general opinion, his father was easily influenced by individuals, and this lack of independence was hateful to Emil, the more so as he was most sensibly affected by it. The fact was that the General had a habit, where the education of his son was concerned, of taking all the advice that was given him. Every week, so Emil declared, he came home with some new idea, which he proceeded to apply. One day it was of supreme importance that the boy should not speak unless he was spoken to; and then this was forgotten, as his father was concerned only to catch him slamming the doors; and a little later he could slam them if he chose, for the General's whole attention was directed to noting whether he wiped his lips before drinking. The torment of this mode of treatment reached its climax when the General began to insist that Emil should get up directly he woke. The boy was then in his sixteenth year. Instead of the explanatory exhor-

tations which he should have received long before this, his father favoured him only with pointed allusions, which were made in a tone of solemn warning, and these merely aggravated his distress; while his mother repelled him by her whining and baseless complaints that "they put altogether too much on her." In the extremity of his spiritual wretchedness the apparently sturdy youth attempted suicide. This gratified a profound and obscure impulse of revenge; but he realized that his revenge had failed. He saw his father sobbing; but this gave him no satisfaction; only an obscure and paralysing knowledge.

About this time his sister Suzanne married an army surgeon of high rank. She had suffered less than he from the domestic situation; she was her father's favourite, and she knew how to manage her mother. She was a sensible, good-natured girl. If Mme de la Roncière put a sweet on the table, with the remark that it was only for Emil, she quietly helped herself, despite her mother's scolding, since Emil refused to eat alone; and then her mother would complain, and even weep. For the rest, she was absorbed in her own affairs, or displayed a phlegmatic patience. Her coolness was often conspicuous, and it

was she who found the right thing to say on the occasion of an incident which made a third with the sensation of Emil's attempted suicide and her own marriage.

One evening, just after her marriage, she and her husband were alone with her brother from Gand, who had attended her wedding and had not yet left the house. Suddenly they realized that their mother was nowhere to be found. After an excited search they at last discovered that she had locked herself into the sewing-room. She would not answer their questions, and seemed to be angrily making some sort of preparations. Only when Emil entreated her did she cry plaintively that now she too was going to hang herself. The Belgian son, who knew nothing of the state of affairs that prevailed in the house, was aghast. "What's this?" he cried, turning to the others; and he wanted to know who had been distressing their mother. He was told morosely to be silent; but behind the door of the sewing-room there was a burst of dismal and sarcastic laughter. The preparations were then apparently completed. The listeners called for a locksmith, for a doctor. The son-in-law, who had hitherto been silent, had to remind them that he himself was a doctor, should one be needed,

which seemed to him improbable. There was a long pause. Then Suzanne's voice was heard: "Let's go to bed now, then she'll come out." What brutality! But now, what with the alternate noise and silence in the closed room, and the listening and the fruitless pleading of the family, it was already midnight, and gradually they all withdrew, shrugging their shoulders and tired with long standing. On the following morning Mme de la Roncière was discovered in the breakfast-room, busied about her household tasks, as though nothing had happened. To Emil, who was helping his brother to pack, the latter remarked, smiling, that it was just as well that Suzanne's husband had not previously experienced any incidents like that of the evening before. Emil, who was at the moment holding the bandbox with the false bottom, made no reply. He had thought that he might perhaps obtain some advice from his brother, feeling that he could rely on his experience of the world; but it was just this experience that now made him draw back before he had opened his mouth. And even Suzanne, to whom he might have appealed, since she had remained in Paris, had lately assumed a didactic tone, indulging in traditional admonitions, which, as he

had to admit, became her very well, although he had done nothing to deserve them. More and more he lapsed into a bewildered apathy, an indifference to all that befell him, an indifference that undermined his energies, yet gave him no relief. Whether this was due to the fact that he was doing worse and worse in the grammar-school which he attended, or whether, as he himself believed, his failure at school was due to his increasing desperation, in any case the admonitions of his grown-up relatives to the effect that he must first complete his schooling, "and then they would consider further," had for him no meaning. He himself admitted that "real life" could only come long after he had left school, but he was quite unable to say what he meant by real life; and when, nevertheless, he plucked up courage to say that anyhow he didn't mean anything so simple as that he naturally couldn't enter a profession of any kind before he had left school, he had a hostile encounter with his father, who always concluded by declaring "that all this was extravagant nonsense, just so much shuffling, whose only purpose was to conceal the boy's mere laziness." He was provoked by the audacity with which Emil maintained that one did not need to learn thoroughly what one could look

up afterwards; it was enough to learn *where* one could look it up; and when Emil pointed out that on the other hand one learned mathematics, he retorted that this was an evasion, since learning mathematics was a question of capacity. Emil was silent; the logic of the reply struck him at once, and impressed him so that he gazed at his father in astonishment, and almost joyfully, in spite of the snub he had received. At other times his father constantly contradicted himself; for example, it was his aim at all costs to break the boy's will, but now he burst into a rage if Emil, with his comprehensive lack of interest, answered all his remarks by, "As you will!"

That his son should receive a good report from his teachers, although he worked too little, was quite incomprehensible to the simple-minded General. Emil, however, took no real interest in his classes; he did what he was obliged to do as a matter of business, whose possibly unfortunate results were his own affair and did not concern his partners. Consequently he refused to co-operate with his school-fellows in any of their more dubious undertakings, and was passionately hated for his refusal. He alone of them was of the opinion that his fortuitous association with them could not possibly entail the obliga-

tion of taking part in a piece of mischief which simply bored him, and, moreover, might have unpleasant consequences, such as impositions that wasted his time. Thereby he gained a reputation for good behaviour, and the good will of the average schoolmaster; meanwhile, the more thoughtful members of the staff had noted the depression which seemed to be at the root of the boy's behaviour, and one or another of them often drew him into conversation in the hope of discovering what was going on in his mind.

He was never able to tell them anything intelligible; his conception of general questions evoked laughter, surprise, and consternation. For example, he declared the notion of the "honour of the class" to be nonsensical; how could such a thing as a special sense of honour, like one's private sense of honour—if that, too, wasn't mere nonsense—exist in a group which was formed without any will or desire of its own? As for the sense of solidarity in which his school-fellows complained that he was lacking—he thought it mere foolishness to manifest it for its own sake, or rather for the sake of the manifestation; for all it amounted to, unless something very serious was at stake, was at most the punishment of

a schoolboy who was unwilling to confess; or supposing the class refused to betray the name of the offender, and, instead of being punished alone, he was punished with all the rest of the class—with a number of boys whom he had not consulted before he committed his offence—where was the sense of the proceeding? For his own part, Emil confessed, he was quite incapable, as one of the others, of being proud of such heroism.

This might have far-reaching consequences. It entailed, or might entail, the monstrous consequence that a man might be prevented from exercising a faculty which was really his vocation, but which he was unable to exercise in the manner prescribed. Certainly the nation had to protect itself against charlatanry; yet might not an astronomer of genius be ignorant of history? And there were many things which could not, like history, be conquered by diligence; there were all sorts of complicated obstacles. . . . Here the attentive teacher asked whether Emil would like to be an astronomer, and Emil gazed at him and said, as though to himself: "Oh, my God!" But if any of his masters thought that enough had been heard of his fallacious arguments it was always easy to silence the boy; they had only to ask

him what particular profession their backward methods of teaching were preventing him from adopting. To this question he was never able to reply.

Now and again the question of a choice of profession was raised at home. In these discussions it appeared that the General called every profession "artistic" which was certain to be unprofitable, or was not certain to be profitable; such was his sarcastic way of putting it; and he added privately that at the time when his eldest son had become a painter his choice of profession was of no particular consequence, except as public evidence that his father was a magnanimous gentleman, an enlightened parent, and, last but not least, a man who was able to afford himself such a luxury. But the times had altered, and he scolded and swore that in these days everyone must look out for himself, and that to bring up a boy as an idler was the act of an irresponsible person. Behind all this, as Emil had long realized, there was a genuine grief; it hurt the General to think that none of his sons was an officer, although he was careful not to confess the fact. His opinion of Emil, and of his relations with him, was such that he could not possibly bring himself to confess to a desire whose

fulfilment depended entirely on his son's pleasure. Now and again Emil was moved by a paltry pride on hearing his father tell strangers that he would, of course, have liked to see one of his boys in the king's uniform, but God forbid that he should take it upon himself to force a growing youth from the path of his inclination! His hearers admired his generous way of thinking and his freedom from any sort of narrowness, even of the most intelligible kind, and this was a great consolation to him. Under the influence of such scenes Emil, in stormy excitement, tried to break down at this point the barrier that divided him from his father; but on each occasion he reminded himself of the old man's lack of intuition, of his inability to see what was behind things; and he knew beforehand how he would innocently and unsuspectingly stick to his word, the word of a matter-of-fact person, quite impregnable, who would always be right, although everyone else should differ from him, and would be justly annoyed if anybody were to tell him so, for that was how he was made; moreover, Emil had never seriously thought of becoming an officer. For that matter, he had never thought of becoming an artist; his father's hatred of this profession was so

unreasoning; indeed, it drove Emil, when he first realized it, to visit his brother's studio, partly for the fun of the thing, but also in a spirit of superficial defiance. But he discovered in himself no trace of a vocation. He had displayed a pretty talent for drawing at school, and now that his imagination had freer play he quickly made a certain amount of progress; but his brother, a silent man, prematurely grey, whose attitude was at first instinctively sceptical, since he was averse to the appearance of a second painter in his immediate neighbourhood, admitted, before long, in a quite ungrudging fashion, that Emil gave signs of a definite though restricted talent; it was not, however, clear in which direction it pointed; perhaps the boy might be an architect. Even this prospect was displeasing to the General; dependence on the public fancy, and snatching at chance opportunities, he grumbled, were not to his liking. Emil really agreed with this, but since for the time being this animosity merely encouraged him, he had repeated battles with his father, to which his mother, who mutely took his part, contributed by her hysterical sobbing.

These disagreeable relations moved the General once more to go campaigning, though he was under

no necessity of doing so. Incidentally, he hoped in this way to enforce the respect of his family, by the mere fact of his taking the field, and all the more if he distinguished himself. There would surely be no lack of opportunities; a revolution had broken out against Ferdinand VII of Spain, and France was intervening with armed force. The General took part in this intervention, resolved to make short work of the enemies of absolutism.

During the months of his absence comparative peace prevailed in the house. Now and again, indeed, his mother's importunate care moved the eighteen-year-old Emil to outbursts of wrath; but these were quickly stifled by the satisfaction which Mme de la Roncière herself displayed at these lively utterances of her idol. She kept a watch on his coming and going, above all since just lately they had seemed to her to imply an unthinkable state of affairs; she studied his expression indefatigably whenever she spoke to him; she examined his bed in secret, and if she happened to discover a spot of blood, though its trivial origin was obvious, she assailed him without respite in the firm conviction that he had a wound on his body and was concealing it from her. Also he invariably found some of his brother's

linen in his wardrobe. If he then lost patience and shouted at her, his mother gazed at him eagerly, nodded, and advised him "to give her a good scolding, it would do him good." That took the wind out of his sails.

But his state of mind was worse than ever. The happiness of his relations with a certain girl, which had at first wholly absorbed him, and had only made him feel freer and stronger, was gradually replaced by mental confusion, owing to the feelings which she suddenly kindled in him; now, directly he was alone, he felt as though he had fallen from a ladder that led to heaven. He broke his bonds, but his longing became more violent; it aroused rebellion in him, but the rebel knew not where to strike; and where he had formerly sought only peace he discovered aversion. In the smother of his still smouldering repentance his acute weariness of school burst into a flame, and he conceived a plan to strike off the loathsome fetters. Any future shone golden above the blackness of such present misery; any means was lawful which would enable him to escape. Emil knew one means; it promised success and even justified it; he set to work.

It was easy enough to cajole his mother into agree-

ing that he should immediately leave school. Opportunity was what he needed; he had wasted his time so long in mistaking life itself for opportunity. And freedom was opportunity, he declared, striding up and down the room. The infatuated woman listened to this devoutly, happy to receive his confidences. She assured him that she would put everything before his father, and that her one thought in life was that she must protect her poor boy.

So when the General returned she assailed him almost in the doorway with her account of what had happened; it was done, irrevocably, whether he liked it or not, let him take that for granted; she would see to that! In her many idle hours she had pictured this moment to herself, while the General, in her imagination, had become an adversary, and her accumulated rancour overflowed at once in a spate of precipitate phrases. M. de la Roncière stood amazed; then he removed his helmet; brusquely he asked for more precise information. Thereupon Emil came forward and said quietly that all this was not so unconsidered as might appear from his mother's explanation; in short, he wanted to become an officer. His father glanced at him briefly, growled something of which Emil caught only the words, "All the

same . . .” and “over my head!” and withdrew blustering to his study. He was not visible again until the evening, and at supper he was obstinately silent. But before they went to bed he laid his hand on Emil’s shoulder and asked him: “Are you in earnest about this?” Emil could see a glitter in his pale eyes. “Yes, father!” he said in a firm voice; and the old man drew the boy to him and, with his cool lips, kissed him on the forehead and then on the mouth. Emil found himself suddenly struggling with his tears. That night, as he lay awake, he was conscious of a satisfaction which somehow seemed unreal, for it was mingled with pleasure in the ironical thought that he should be the one to fulfil the wish of his father’s heart—and by such methods.

His arbitrary behaviour was forgotten. The very next day the General proceeded to take the necessary steps, and this he did with such zeal and activity that he astonished everyone. Having hastily assured himself that Emil was still firm in his resolve, he discarded all reserve, and was full of a half-childish, half-solemn ardour. He at once proceeded to treat his son familiarly as a friend, and officially as a young comrade; he spoke excitedly and urgently when he returned from his excursions; he described in glow-

ing colours the life that awaited the boy, and was lavish of premature advice and instruction. Bright-red patches appeared on the cheek-bones of his little face. "As an officer, my dear fellow, you are everything," he said. Emil smiled to himself; for his own part he was inclined to believe that as officer he would still be "nothing," and it was only for this reason that he had found it easy to decide for an officer's career. But he held his peace. Something very curious had happened to him; he had had to realize that by the morning—and, indeed, even overnight—he had really changed his mind, but he could hardly have confessed as much in response to his father's anxious and fumbling inquiries; for the old man's longing for a soldier son had its origin not in the desire to plume himself on the fact, and to have in the family, where he counted for nothing, at least one person who would be compelled to realize what a general was (as Emil had always believed); it was based rather on the wish that there might be at least one of his children whom he did not support merely with money, but with his power, his influence; in short, with what he had personally achieved. Emil had at last become conscious of this, and he felt ashamed. It did not matter that the Gen-

eral over-estimated his own importance and that his mother had years ago judged his position correctly. As a matter of fact, in the recent campaign, which had in itself been a failure, he had won only a Spanish order; the promotion he longed for was not for him; there was a superfluity of officers of high rank.

M. de la Roncière consoled himself; he forgot his resentment in the devotion with which he furthered his son's affairs. Even his wife's behaviour troubled him no longer; though his agreement with Emil robbed her of a conflict in which she had delighted. Whenever the father and son consulted together she blustered peevishly, as though an intentional slight had been put upon her; in everything that was said she looked for an attack upon herself, and she even went so far as to believe that her husband had returned merely in order to spite her. At the same time she began to suffer from fears that were new to her; she persuaded herself that her husband and son were conspiring against her, and that they wanted to put her into an asylum. Emil tried to pacify and reconcile his mother; his father simply thrust his wife aside; the crazy woman, he said, was of no consequence; all that mattered was that Emil should be an ensign within the week. He had suc-

ceeded in obtaining a commission for him in one of the feudal cavalry regiments; and not without difficulty, for the young nobles were one and all anxious to remain in the capital. Emil reminded himself that he had really had some idea of becoming an artillery officer or a pioneer, for the sake of the intellectual work entailed; but his father's urgency would tolerate no pause for reflection. Now he shrank from the thought of disappointing him; besides, it was too late to protest. He submitted. The splendid uniform delighted him, and the unaccustomed good-fellowship, and the consciousness of his manly dignity. His path was smoothed for him. By his nineteenth birthday he was a lieutenant.

YET he was a bad officer; or at least he soon had the reputation of being such. He was not accused of slackness, nor of insubordination; nothing of that sort; indeed, to begin with he was not accused of anything. What made him generally disliked before he had been long in the army was something less

obvious; something more difficult to take hold of; something more imponderable, and also more difficult to deny. The trouble was that he hadn't the right spirit; one could see that he was secretly a refractory sort of fellow; he was inclined to malicious criticism; he always knew better than anyone else; there was no relying on him. Everyone had an uncomfortable feeling that he had eyes at the back of his head; everyone read an unspoken comment in his glance and on his closed lips. His superiors found him embarrassing, and his comrades avoided him as a superior fellow. They had excuse enough, and sometimes more than excuse. In those early years his fanatical sense of justice often took the form of disputatiousness, and his logic of pedantry.

Thus, on a certain occasion he was dining in the country with several fellow-officers. On the road a man who was walking in the same direction approached their hired carriage, exchanged a few words with the driver, and then swung himself on the empty seat beside the latter, with only a cursory glance at the occupants of the carriage. La Roncière thereupon flew into a rage, and his irritation merely increased when his companions attempted to appease him and convince him that the matter was of no importance.

He obstinately insisted that in the absence of permission from the persons who had hired the carriage the man's action was a piece of impudence, since, to consider the matter theoretically, he could not know that they were not obliged to reach their goal as quickly as possible, whereas he was reducing, by his weight, the pace of the horse, which they had taken fully into account, and for which they had hired the animal. Some of his companions found his exactitude comical, and others tedious, but he lost the sympathy of one and all, and was thereafter known as a crass egotist. His superior officers were always shaking their heads over him. One evening, towards twilight, Emil appeared in the house of his brother-in-law; a reception was being held there, to which he had been invited. Using the privilege of a relative, he presented himself early, principally in order to have time for Suzanne's child, who was then ten months old, and to whom he was tenderly devoted. Absorbed in the final preparations for the evening, the father and mother left him alone with the child, and finally, it seemed, forgot that he was there. The child, however, began to cry, so that those guests who were already assembled in the hall suddenly began to watch the gallery, since they distinguished the

heavy bass voice of the lieutenant. He was dutifully singing lullaby after lullaby, fervently anxious to soothe the squalling child, but it sounded as though he was trying to drown the voices of the singers. Since nothing he could do would quiet the child, he proceeded, in his extremity, to look for assistance, and absently humming a lullaby came out upon the gallery, and then suddenly broke off his song; and the child in his arms was silenced likewise, dazzled by the blaze of light and the brilliance of the dresses and uniforms of the persons moving in the hall below. Now, of course, they all stood still and gazed at the gallery, and there was the embarrassed lieutenant, with an apron over his gala uniform and the infant on his arm. For a moment he stood, and the company gazed; then he lifted the child up, while a helpless smile made his swarthy face for a moment handsome, and he cried softly to the watchers: "It's a girl!" Thereupon he fled back into the room, where he was relieved with all possible speed. The guests laughed, and had it concerned anyone but Emil the *contretemps* would not have left a bad impression. In him, however, of whom nothing good was expected, his behaviour was considered as a foolish affectation, and the gentlemen to whom his military

education was entrusted did not hesitate to regard the incident as yet another proof that he was lacking in the qualities proper to his rank.

If he was lacking in deportment he was lacking in ability; the one thing was deduced from the other; and people had made up their minds about La Roncière. Then came the scandal about the Prince, which lost Emil what little favour he had gained. The Prince, who was little more than a boy, was then ensign in the regiment. After a test ride across country it happened that only the men cooked their food in the open air; the officers and under-officers were to eat in a tavern near at hand. It was arranged that the under-officers were to eat first, and when they arrived a long table was already set with rows of plates of hot meat, while in an adjacent room the table had only just been laid for the officers. But the princely ensign, who was hungry, as the officers passed through the first room, sat himself down, as though for a jest, at the non-commissioned officers' table, since there was a place as yet unoccupied, and began to eat. Immediately on this the corporals entered the room, and with them Emil, who as the youngest lieutenant had to supervise the feeding of the horses. The ensign rose, for he had finished, and with boy-

ish delight assumed an unconcerned air, lit a cigar, and furtively watched the corporal whose dinner he had eaten, and who now stood smiling in embarrassment before his empty plate. His comrades greeted the young prince's trick with complaisant and respectful amusement. Emil, who was passing the table, stopped short, took in the scene at a glance, and changed colour. In a cutting tone he requested the ensign to follow him. The two officers went out again, and then Emil was heard outside the tavern shouting at the ensign. He saw red; the defencelessness of the corporal against the lackadaisical young fellow, who walked delicately, secure in his inviolability, roused him to fury; almost foaming with rage, he gave vent to his wrath in a torrent of harsh, wounding, pitiless phrases, which frightened the offender almost out of his life. He shouted so loud that all the officers came running up to him; he was trembling with rage, and had to be led away almost by force. The young prince was nearly crying; he was hardly to be persuaded that a duel was out of the question. Not only was it undesirable, considering his identity, but he himself was obliged to admit that the lieutenant had not actually made use of insulting words; consequently his outburst was to be regarded merely

as an official reproof, however immoderate, which, by the letter of the law, it was actually his duty to administer. Practically, of course, La Roncière had gone altogether too far. It was out of the question that he should remain in the regiment. They had had enough of the unnecessary scandals which he was always causing. The General was told that the free life of Paris was having a bad effect on his son; he needed stricter discipline. The old man fumed and swore; Emil took his leave of him without seeing him. He was transferred to the Dragoons in the provinces. He did not take this amiss; for some time his loneliness had once again been absolute; he was full of a speculative delight in the world, combined with an active desire to take possession of it. In his arrogance there was much humility; in his scorn there was compassion, and in his defiance intrepidity.

His bad reports created prejudice wherever he went, and the feeling that he must go armed against this prejudice made him seem litigious or arrogant. He was thought to be a violent and cynical person, although he was merely unrestrained and wielded an indefectible wit. Once, after dinner, in the officers' club, a bald-headed major came up to him, a coxcomb whose manners were too perfect to be good, and

addressed him as follows: "I am told," he said in his falsetto tones, "that you have said that I am a booby. I ask you, is that true?" "It is true," replied Emil, "but I did not say so!" Thus despatched the major withdrew incensed, and some of the bystanders went so far as to laugh. Actually everyone feared lest he should be the next victim of this injudicious fellow, and so joined the majority who had loathed him from the first. He was hated especially for his impenetrability; one always had to be on one's guard with him; he was a thorn in the side of all those who liked a comfortable jog-trot existence, and of all the duffers, who began to blink with distress as soon as he approached. Hence he came to be regarded as a suspicious sort of fellow, from whom one might expect every kind of inconsiderateness, and this opinion was enormously intensified by an affair which he had in the Dragoons. This made him widely known as a mutinous, insubordinate fellow, an enemy of all order, who contrived to carry things off so artfully that he could never be definitely incriminated. The story itself was simple enough.

Late at night, in a disreputable quarter of the little town, several officers of high rank, and among them the colonel of the regiment, entered the street

from certain obscure premises. A senior lieutenant, who happened to be passing at the moment, recognized them despite their civilian clothes, and was indiscreet enough to salute them. On the following day his major seized the first opportunity of picking a quarrel with him, and under cover of his official correctness overwhelmed him with reproaches; and lastly, when all had been said, the lieutenant, within twenty-four hours, was given the command of a horse-transport going to Scotland. This in itself was not particularly tragic, but the officer was lately married, and it was known that his wife was expecting a child in the following week, and unless the order was rescinded the husband could not be back in time; he was desperate.

Emil, on learning what had occurred, sought out his elder comrade, and directly he understood the true motive of this incomprehensible order he burst into a rage. He expressed his mind in the most immoderate terms; he raved with fury, and there was no holding him in. Such things, he cried, could not be; what sort of a prospect had they if such conduct was permitted? To the startled witnesses of this outbreak, who put it to him that the whole affair was none of his business, he cried, white to the very lips,

that it was shameful to argue thus, and it simply wasn't good enough to live among such people; and when, hesitating and astonished, they asked him whether he was absolutely afraid of nothing or of no one, he retorted, beside himself: "Am I to be afraid of human beings?" He forced his way into the Colonel's presence and threatened him with extreme measures, with a public exposure. The Colonel saw plainly enough that this fanatical fellow would stop at nothing, and he surrendered. The feeling that he was humouring an eccentric character made it easier for him to give way; and even those who were not directly concerned in the matter, despite the respect which they secretly felt for Emil, could not help feeling that his extravagance had, after all, been quite out of proportion to his object. And they could see that even the lieutenant for whom he had intervened, and who was greatly indebted to him, felt that his protector was a most uncomfortable sort of fellow. As was to be expected, they took the quickest way of getting rid of him. He was transferred to a third regiment. Once more it was a dragoon regiment.

Here he was received with a formality which plainly showed that they were prepared for the worst, and were at the same time determined to make short

work of this brawler. But when they cast about for material with which to twist a rope for him the result of their efforts was meagre. His men had no ill-usage to report; he handled them firmly, but that only gave them confidence in him; he scourged them with rough sarcasm, but this they understood; he was absolutely free from conceit, and made no secret of his clumsiness, although in bodily strength he by far outstripped them all; they were devoted to their giant lieutenant. As for his private life, it was true that all sorts of stories were whispered of his relations with the other sex, but these were not particularly scandalous, and therefore provided no weapon to be used against him. No one could see quite how they were to set to work. They tackled Philippe Ambert, but he only assured them, loyally, that in his opinion the ne'er-do-well had really great potential abilities, and they had to give it up; after all, it might be true!

Lieutenant Ambert understood nothing of all this. He had for a long while been the victim of a good deal of chaff as the person who enjoyed the privilege of being La Roncière's intimate; and it caused great amusement when he modestly denied the distinction. Ambert was of no importance in the regiment. His

intelligence did not qualify him for anything more than service at the front, and in this respect he suffered from a disadvantage that made his life a burden to him; he had not the loud voice of a field-officer. Whenever he tried to make his pleasant little voice heard above the trampling of horses and the jingle of weapons, his little figure standing literally on its toes in the stirrups, his round face, swelling with his exertions, turned purple, and he offered a pitiable spectacle. On one occasion, at platoon drill, he had to give over the command to Emil, whose tremendous voice drowned everything; for his martial crowings were so grotesque that the ranks were beginning to laugh at him. Afterwards Emil went up to the unfortunate fellow. The stocky little man gazed up at him good-humouredly. Ambert's hair was the colour of straw; the upper part of his forehead, as far as the rim of his helmet, was white as a bladder of lard, and the lower part, like the whole of his face, was red, and in this red face the light eyebrows and the little blue eyes looked somehow inadequate. The first time Emil visited him he saw him, before he entered the house, through the window of the ground-floor sitting-room, bent over a book; and he lingered a few moments in the street, absorbed in the

contemplation of the unconscious man, who was eagerly moving his lips as he read; he smiled to himself and went in. From this time onwards he often visited Ambert, but Ambert never came to him. He strode up and down in Ambert's comfortable room, telling him all that was in his mind, while his host sat on the sofa behind the table making tea and following the speaker with vivacious eyes, but seldom interjecting a remark. In the company of his fellow-officers, when the latter, in order to draw him out, pretended to admire Emil as the Don Juan of the regiment, he kept his eyes on the floor. They had all been encouraged by the Colonel, whom they were anxious to oblige, to cure the "dark horse" of his ambition—to which, as a matter of fact, he never gave expression, but which was none the less obvious. Meanwhile Emil was his familiar self, and described his "longing for love," of which they longed to learn more, as "the need of the imaginative spirit for sustenance"; and the portentous tone in which he uttered the words made them a jest with which he derided the importunate. They left him alone after that, but they agreed indignantly—and their agreement gave them a feeling of solidarity—that seducers were always of this pattern; the women would abso-

lutely besiege a fellow like that! And he would know how to give them the rough side of his tongue!

Ambert alone guessed that this was nonsense; and many a girl knew better. But the wild man kissed them because they did not know better, because they knew only the best of him. They knew the secret tenderness which stole forth from the very depths of his being, as though the darkness of midnight had released an enchanted prince from his dungeon; it was as though his nature was smiling at itself. It touched him at such times to hear it whispered beside him "that he could not have been like this to anyone else," for otherwise no one would have let him go; but he was silent. He felt that a strange power controlled him, and behind each one who caught fire from it he saw, close at hand, that one who would stand the test of day. For the dawning day was a sorcerer who turned happiness into illusion, melted the ore of the primitive energies, and thrust back underground what was now only weakness. Then La Roncière sprang up and wrestled with his weakness; harsh and unconcerned he lived it down, heedless even of the darkness until it fell; but it was only rarely that he trampled it under.

And if its creatures followed him into the light

with their passions, he was like a man who sits at the play, distressed, yet unable to intervene, his sole consolation the thought that after the play he can comfort the exhausted actress. He never made a jest of the caprices of the women he had loved; his inability to draw them into the orbit of respectability was to him a painful and crying discord and an injustice to womanhood, and he did his best to make up for it by curtailing his day's work a little in favour of the girls. On the boundary of the two spheres of influence, where the frontiers of the two powers were often confused, this was often possible without shifts or pretences, and he made the most of every pretext and opportunity that offered, for he was grateful; and night after night was full of renewed hope that the body beside him was that which he was seeking, but which his dull senses had not yet recognized, so that every kiss was like a call-note, and his embraces an eternal siege of the soul which perhaps lay waiting for him, under the dross, with something more than lust.

Now it happened that once, in the early morning, the bugles rang through the streets; they were sounding the reveille for manœuvres. Emil wanted to get up at once, but the girl beside whom he lay begged

him to stay; he could see how cold she was; he might surely stay just a little while. Whether she did not know what was afoot, or was merely pretending not to know, in order to put Emil to the test, he gave in and stayed; he stayed willingly, and she saw it and was glad, and that gave him pleasure. In this way he wasted nearly three-quarters of an hour; when he wearily entered the barrack-yard it was empty, and it was late when he joined his troop. He reported and met with an icy reception, but nothing else happened. Towards evening, however, the Colonel sent for him and vouchsafed him, as he entered the room, only a peremptory gesture, which demanded an explanation. Emil confessed immediately that he had been with his mistress. "You will hardly have the face to regard that as an adequate excuse!" cried the angry man. "Certainly not, M. le colonel, but she was so cold." The Colonel started back dramatically, but the words had come so quickly and readily that he at once abandoned the fantastic suspicion that Emil was trying to make a fool of him. "What?" he asked uncertainly. "Cold, M. le colonel; God's truth, she was so miserably cold." "Be silent, sir!" thundered the enraged Colonel, "and clear out of here to where the pepper grows!"

Emil disappeared. He wandered thoughtfully through the streets, saw Ambert sitting beside his lamp, and went in. The little man saw to his comfort, and then sat down and gazed at him expectantly. "Yes, I'm off again, Ambert," said Emil, striding as usual up and down the room. . . . "Yes, the women. They are not life (that only one can be—or it may even be none); but they mean life. For they are full of it; they encounter life everywhere; they simply can't help it; and many of them, often quite young, have had enough of it already; but they haven't grown rich . . . only tired. Those are the ones I love best. . . . Or, to be exact, I don't love them; I am simply tender to them, or good to them, as you call it, and they need that even more. If I don't love them it's because I'm afraid. I'm afraid of parting. Parting, Ambert, is one of the worst things in the world. It hurts a man so to think that no one belongs to him. Ach, Ambert, my heart aches!" He stood for a while at the window, then nodded to the other and went out.

After this he was transferred to Cayenne. The appointment was to be regarded as disciplinary punishment. The Colonel had arrived at the opinion that the dangerous fellow could not be "settled" at one

stroke, for he would never give one a sufficient pretext, and he had to be content with knowing that he was the first to have inflicted any sort of punishment on him. Quite apart from this, he had regarded La Roncière as mentally deficient since his irruption into the regimental office. La Roncière, on the other hand, on arriving in Cayenne, remarked that it was rather too thick that his late Colonel should have sent him thither simply because, having once let fall a colloquial allusion to the country "where the pepper grows," he insisted, as usual, on keeping to his word.

In other respects he was not ill content with the island. The society of Cayenne consisted of the most varied elements; there were some who were conscientiously atoning for their faults, and others who were smarting with resentment; some who were fortune's fools, and some to whom all things were indifferent. The commandant, a man of few words, who had had much experience of all sorts of wild characters, averted trouble by granting them a good deal of liberty, and Emil inspired him with confidence. At the same time, however, he caused him a certain anxiety—an obscure anxiety which many had aroused. "I'm uneasy," he would say, "about these

children of fate"; and, as he had often done before, he tried to relieve himself of this anxiety by doing what was, in the opinion of all those under his charge, the only thing he could do to show his good will—he did what he could to secure Emil's return to Europe. So it was agreed, when a year or more had gone by, that Emil should be punished no further; firstly, because the moment he considered that his offence was being too severely punished he might be expected to indulge in one of his furious outbreaks; and secondly, out of consideration for his father. No one knew that Emil had contemptuously tossed aside the General's letters; they were written with all his old affectation and were full of the complaints of a man who, like all who had achieved military honour, could but condemn his misguided son. For his part, he knew nothing of the indefatigable efforts which his father was making on his behalf.

He was strangely disturbed by the circumstance that almost immediately after the commandant of the island had informed him of his release and his appointment to the 1st Lancers, he received instructions from the regiment to proceed immediately to Saumur; it was his good fortune to have been de-

tached for instruction in the cavalry school; he would not report to his regiment until he had completed his course. He crumpled the order in his hand. This was a distinction, but one that he considered no better than banishment if it was meant only to keep him from his troop. He shrugged his shoulders and sailed for France. It was only then that he realized that he was dragging behind him a train of lying accusations; a tenacious web of exaggerated, distorted, and distorting infamies that was diligently woven afresh as he wore it out. What was the explanation? He did not attempt to find one; it seemed too early. He did not try to cast the net off his shoulders; it seemed too late. He did not look for the weavers; and what they wove he bore as lightly as a cloak by which a man is recognized—or mistaken; it mattered little which, in the case of an imaginary mantle which he accepted as a protection and an adornment from those to whom he did not vouchsafe a backward glance; and so he appeared among the irreproachables who awaited him in Saumur. Calm and collected he appeared once more among them, absolutely and magnificently unembarrassed.

There was Ambert. The new-comers were crowded together in the courtyard; Ambert made his way

out of the throng. He came up to Emil in embarrassment, stammering that his voice was good for nothing, that must be taken for granted; but, on the other hand, it had always been only a presumption that he was good for nothing in other respects, where one didn't have to shout; and that was why he was there. And there was Octave d'Estange. His tall, thin figure suddenly rose before Emil. He displayed a certain lively interest, not in any way malicious; but now they only exchanged a formal handshake. He had long been a captain; he had been lieutenant when Emil had begun his service under him in Paris. Ten years; the tumult round about him roared in his ears; here was aspiration and the will to learn; they one and all had it; he alone aspired to nothing, not even to learn how his cloak became him; but without aspiration one learned nothing; he, at least, had learned nothing, except that girls are always nineteen years old, while he was growing older and learning nothing. . . . He said something of this, rather incoherently, to Ambert, who had once more come up to him after the captain had moved away: "Let us go out, first of all," Emil exclaimed. Ambert complied. Emil stepped out, with bowed head. "Do you know," he said, "this is a curious thing; they don't

see that I am only nineteen, or even sixteen. I can't congratulate myself on the point. They think I am grown up—thirty. A crazy, lamentable business, comrade!" He turned round suddenly. They were standing at the gate. Ambert looked up at him eloquently, half opened his mouth, and smoothed out a crease on Emil's breast. He submitted that he must now go in again. They parted, and Emil slowly, and in a mood of gentle melancholy, went in search of quarters.

As he stamped jingling through the sunny streets, the picture of energy, he attracted general attention. His upright, powerful figure had a clumsy appearance, since hips and shoulders were of equal width. He had heavy hands and feet, and a handsome, well-shaped head, with black hair, which he always wore rather longer than was customary or prescribed, and which grew low against his neck like a woman's. He had a thick, untidy moustache, over excellent teeth; his large black eyes were calm, clear, and cool as water.

THREE

IN the dining-room of the Hôtel de l'Europe, where he had taken up his quarters for the time being, since he had not been able at once to find suitable lodgings, La Roncière was sitting after dinner and drinking black coffee. His table was near the door which led to the kitchen and offices and was sur-

rounded by a screen. Suddenly a tumult arose from the farther side of the screen; the curses of a man, the clatter of overturned chairs, and then a woman's voice shrieking for help. La Roncière listened for a moment; then as the woman's voice was raised a second time, and now, as it seemed, in lamentation, he sprang to his feet, hesitated for a second behind the screen, and then thrust open the door, which was ajar. He stepped into a small room, from which he could see through a glass door into the kitchen; but even as he stood there the disturbance at the back of the kitchen ceased, and the voices died away out of doors; he could hear nothing but the talk and laughter of the servants and the clatter of knives and forks. But in front of him, huddled against a scullery table, was a girl of perhaps sixteen; her apron was wet, and she was sobbing.

"What was happening here?" inquired La Roncière.

"He was trying to beat her again," replied the child, without looking up. "M. Mortier was trying to beat Madame; he used never to do it."

"And why is he doing it now, then?" asked La Roncière, who was secretly longing to be gone, for the smell of food was oppressive in the little room.

"They say he caught her doing something." La Roncière could already see the provocative glance which she would now give him, and turned to go; but, as a matter of fact, instead of looking at him, the girl once more began to sob aloud. He stood his ground and considered her: her thin arms in their rolled-up sleeves, and her fair, reddish hair; she was rather pretty, but very meanly dressed. She wiped away her tears with her hand.

"Why are you crying so?" La Roncière asked her. "You are not related to them, are you? Or what is it?"

"No, I am no relation; I only come in to wash up; but I am always crying, I can't help it."

"How is that?" he asked, half in jest, half in earnest.

"I am always crying now; I can't help it. If there's any reason for it I don't cry about *that*, but there *is* something that I can't help always crying about. My name is Catrine," she suddenly added.

La Roncière smiled. "And what is the something that you can't help crying about?" he asked. She looked into his eyes for the first time. What a touching little face she had!

"Oh, Monsieur, that's a very long story!"

"Tell it me in a few words, Catrine." He nodded to her.

She sobbed confidentially. "My father was a rope-maker," she told him, gradually growing calmer. "We lost him a little while ago, my mother and I. He worked alone; my mother used often to help him, and so did I, but there are things we don't really understand, and neither of us can make rope-ladders, and we haven't any left in the shop. We are selling now only what was in stock; we can't keep any journeymen, but we thought that if we could get orders from the school again, and a little paid on account, then, we thought, we could still carry on. And now M. l'Adjutant has ordered a rope-ladder for to-day, but if he doesn't get it perhaps he'll be angry, and perhaps he won't give us the contract, or anything on account, and how shall we pull up again then? I thought I would just go and ask him; he's in there again; he's generally here when they are there, he and M. le Baron."

She was peeping through the crack of the door into the dining-room, and La Roncière, standing behind her and following the direction of her eyes, saw an officer, a stranger to him, whose appearance had already struck him, seated at a small table. He was

reading his notebook, and as he read he mechanically smoothed his eyebrows with a pocket brush. He was a man still young, in rank a captain. "That fellow is adjutant already!" muttered La Roncière, grimacing. Catrine, over whose head he was peering, slipped nimbly to one side. "That's right," she assured him, "and I thought if Monsieur would perhaps just speak to him . . ."

"You overestimate my influence, my dear child," growled La Roncière, without moving from where he stood. Then with a start he turned away from the door, and once more faced the girl, who stood there in disappointment.

"But I'll help you in another way," he said briskly. "I've a rope-ladder, and you shall have it. I must just have a look for it; it must be there still, as good as new; in a word, it'll serve your purpose. Tomorrow, Catrine; that's settled. And not another tear!" He nodded to the child, who gazed at him with round, tearful eyes that were now incredulously happy, and clanked out of the room.

He paid his account and vigorously saluted the adjutant, who returned his salute with a slight bow, and left the hotel in order to seek his room. Then he thought better of it, and went out into the open air.

It was already growing dark. He made for the bridge over the Loire and for the house of his commanding officer. Baron de Morell was a general—a result of the over-filling of the higher ranks, which had not ceased even under Louis Philippe—and as a general was at liberty to spend part of the year in Paris. La Roncière, leaning against the balustrade of the bridge, gazed awhile at the house—a two-storied building of sandstone with a flat roof and a tasteless façade. Two rows of windows, of uniform size, were lit up. Then he turned back, as though he had only wished to assure himself that the General had really returned.

Actually, however, he was by no means so interested in the General's arrival as were his fellow-officers, for whom the opening of the commanding officer's house was an event of social importance. But the appearance of the adjutant, a figure unmistakably Parisian, had excited his curiosity, together with a vague antipathy. His curiosity was now appeased, and as for the antipathy, he suppressed it as unfounded. Of late he had become anxious to influence his own character; he had begun to regard himself reflectively; he had made the discovery with astonishment. "One grows up," he had told Ambert. It

was possible, too, that a feeling of comfort was partly responsible for this change; that his bitter mood was already a little mellowed by the fortnight which he had already spent here, almost completely idle; as though the sojourn of six months that lay before him was in a sense an assurance, was indeed a period of delay, a pause in his life, given him that he might collect himself and look about him. He couldn't explain it, but he felt it so, and he gratefully yielded himself to the notion. The little town had quickly become familiar to him; contentedly he strode through the evening traffic of the streets.

In the hotel he found a message from Ambert, who believed that he had discovered the right quarters for him. On the following day they proved to be suitable. The sisters Rouault let him two large comfortably furnished rooms on the ground-floor and a room for his servant in the attics of their little house, in which they lived alone with one maid. They were orphans, as one could see: two fair, pleasant women, very like one another, but Annette Rouault was a girl, while Élise, the elder, was past her first youth. She gave the impression that she had resolved in this case to take an interest in her lodger only because it seemed the surest way of protecting her sister, for

whom she filled the place of a mother. La Roncière made this observation to Ambert; his experience of such matters was so great that the state of affairs was bound to strike him; but all that he deduced from it was that they were evidently prepared to regard him with the greatest confidence.

And apparently he was not wrong. When they returned to the hotel in order to breakfast there once more before La Roncière's removal, they learned that Monsieur and Madame had suddenly left for the capital, and the restaurant was consequently closed, for Madame herself was the cook. They removed La Roncière's effects, therefore, immediately, and when La Roncière spoke of the incident complainingly to Annette, who was helping him to arrange his possessions in his new home, Élise modestly proposed to him that he could, of course, eat in the house whenever he chose. As for to-day—she hurried off to see whether it was not possible to invite him and his friend to breakfast with them.

And in this way it happened that the little Catherine simply disappeared, as far as La Roncière was concerned. He was not able to tell her that he had looked for his rope-ladder when all his things were unpacked, but had been unable to find it.

FOUR

ON the following Sunday evening he was invited for the first time to the General's house. The drawing-room, in which some fifteen gentlemen were assembled, resounded with suppressed conversation and discreet laughter, which followed the General as he went round the room and greeted his guests. Since

Baron Morell was well acquainted with the bourgeoisie of the town, and was the natural go-between in their intercourse with the officers, but was not acquainted with the officers themselves, as these were changed every three months, it was his custom, first of all, to invite a few of them alone on certain evenings, so that he might obtain some insight into their character, and impart his conclusions to his wife before she herself brought the civilians and the soldiers together. Something of this he expressed in brief phrases to the officers who had unconsciously gathered about him as he stood by the table in the middle of the room. As he stood there with hanging arms his fingers did not reach the surface of the table, so gigantic was his stature; everything about him gave one the impression of being larger than life: hands, shoulders, nose, and forehead, and even his iron-grey thatch of hair; only his friendly-looking eyes were small. He said:

“Well, here we are, all gathered together as though we had met for the criticism of manœuvres; but you needn’t fear anything of that sort. It is just that I want to offer you in my house what I cannot give you as well in the club. But because we are just among ourselves, as we are to-day, you mustn’t think

that this is to be a particularly stiff and military affair; no, we shall all be friendly and free and easy. Here my good Jacquemin will help me"—and he touched the shoulder of his adjutant, in whom La Roncière had recognized the officer he had seen in the dining-room of the hotel—"and you too, D'Estange, if you'll be so good." And while the tall, thin captain bowed the General added: "We knew one another, of course, in Paris." Then he continued: "This would all be very much simpler, gentlemen, but the Baroness, my wife, is unwell, as I am sorry to say she has often been of late years. . . . Well, we must manage by ourselves. She would not readily have withdrawn from her obligations, which here, indeed, would have been a pleasure, and she would, of course, have set about everything quite differently. But she can't appear. But I have, after all, a daughter—yes, I have just lately acquired a daughter. That sounds, doesn't it, as though I meant to introduce you to an infant in arms," and he smiled a winning, boyish smile; "and, as a matter of fact, she really was, in a sense, born only quite recently; that is, born into the world; for she has only just left the convent. Well, I did not wish the child to act here just at once as her mother's representative, for that,

as you will understand, would have simply made things more complicated. Later she will do her best—she is only a novice as the mistress of a house—to entertain her guests.”

The sliding door of the adjoining room began to move; some of the officers looked round; the opening grew wider; and pressed against one of the wings, which moved farther to one side under her pressure, a young girl entered the room, timidly but intently looking for her father, who stood silent in glad astonishment.

“Now that’s what I call a brave young lady,” he cried; “she is here already! But now, Marie, summon up your courage and come right in, so, and do the honours for your mother.” He made his way through the circle of his guests, and closing the door behind the girl he said, in a tone of friendly encouragement: “Gentlemen: Marie, my temerarious daughter!”

Marie still hesitated. Suddenly she threw up her head, took a step forward, and even lifted her arms a little outwards, and smiling roguishly, with tremulous lips, she said aloud: “You are all heartily welcome!” But thereupon she blushed even more deeply than before, dropped her chin on her breast

again, stepped hastily forwards, and offered her hand to each officer in turn, without looking at any of them, her whole childish frame taking part in each hearty handshake. Several of the officers attempted to introduce themselves. The General quietly watched the scene, but finally he said: "*Bien*. For to-night that's enough of formality. For the moment, my child, I don't think you will be able to make a note of these gentlemen's names. After all, we can certainly say that so far you have come out of the affair very nicely. And now that the worst is over, let us all sit down comfortably."

At that moment a servant pushed the sliding doors apart. In the adjoining room the table was lit by two low-hanging chandeliers with great rings of candles, and beyond it two further rooms could be seen, which as yet were only half lit. La Roncière sat in the middle of the table, equally distant from Marie and her father, who sat at the two ends of the table. He noticed, as he sat down, that the General nodded to his daughter as they took their places. He found D'Estance beside him; both smiled, as always when they met.

"That was a pretty little scene just now," said La Roncière.

“Yes, very charming,” replied D’Estance. Then they were separated, and as supper was served the conversation became general.

La Roncière kept his eyes on Marie Morell. She had an exceptionally delicate face, with a beautiful skin and bronze-coloured hair; her eyes were narrow, and he saw, when they rested on him for a moment, that they looked as if they were cut out of brown silk; they seemed to change colour, but to reflect nothing. He was particularly struck by her delicate fingers. She moved them incessantly, although she was now quite collected; she was chattering vivaciously to Jacquemin, who had been placed beside her, because they were acquaintances, although by virtue of his rank he should have been seated elsewhere. Emil thought she seemed glad to be so inconspicuously occupied.

He exchanged a few words with D’Estance. Since their first re-encounter on the day of his arrival a peculiar relation had developed between the two men. It seemed to each of them that the other sought his society. On several occasions they had found themselves together and had conversed freely; neither had intended these meetings, but neither had any desire to avoid them; on the contrary. La Roncière

only noted with amusement the secret delight which the irreproachable D'Estange took in freer views than his own, and he was pleased and eager to express them, despite the ironical calm with which the captain appeared to receive them. He, on the other hand, saw in this relation the unconfessed impulse of a sensible man when confronted by exemplary conduct, despite all the other's abstruse ideas, which for that matter were amusing enough. Octave d'Estange was a model officer; he had never found it difficult to be irreproachable, and he prized this quality of his. His immaculacy was above all reproach, and it pleased him to maintain a public relation with La Roncière from which the latter might hope to derive some benefit. No other sort of relation was conceivable to D'Estange; none which he did not feel was flattering to himself. Now, however, they smiled at one another confidentially at every opportunity, and each fondly imagined that he had found in the other understanding and exceptional insight; and this evoked something like sympathy.

D'Estange remarked that he hardly knew Marie; as a little girl she had now and then come home from her convent school, but hardly ever of late years; and now that she had finally left they had brought

her straight here, as her mother did not wish her to begin to "live" in Paris immediately, "but in our polite and moral circle," said D'Estange jestingly, "Jacquemin being understood in particular"; and he showed his chalk-white teeth, which looked like beans stuck into his gums.

"All the same," said Emil, nodding, "he's a tactful man, the adjutant."

"Perhaps you envy him his place——"

"On the contrary. Always a most tactful person; for example, he has put us together."

"This time we owe it to the proposal I ventured to make at tea here yesterday."

"So? I am pleased to hear that. No, seriously."

"I did it out of sheer egoism."

"Why? You know it is a pleasure to talk to you. Truly!"

"Now you are exaggerating!"

They had turned towards one another, and exchanged a surreptitious glance. After a pause, in which they both watched Marie and the adjutant, La Roncière said:

"Anyhow, one must allow one thing in his favour: he isn't spoiling her appetite!"

"The mother," said D'Estange, "is a duchess. From Vicenza."

"Ah! Napoleonic!"

"A duchess!" D'Estange gently nodded his egg-shaped head while he applied himself to his dessert.

During the last few minutes the adjoining room had been completely lit up. Marie Morell exchanged a glance with her father and rose from the table. Emil noted with pleasure that she then stood irresolute, but at once looked gaily into the faces of all the guests as they approached her in order of their rank. The General spoke a few words to him; he regretted that he had never met him in Paris, and observed incidentally that he knew his father. La Roncière intercepted a searching glance, which he thought was directed upon him in a rather conspicuous manner, and his replies were formal. Meanwhile Marie approached them; apparently she had not had the courage to draw one of the guests into conversation. The General, however, quickly took leave of Emil and moved away, calling Jacquemin to his side. The adjutant was just then returning to the dining room. The General greeted him with some hasty and laughing remark, and the two disappeared among the guests.

Marie stood bashfully before La Roncière. What a little thing she is! he thought. Her ears might have been modelled out of wax. One was white; the left ear was a glowing red. In order to help her, he too now made his bow. Greatly confused, she gave him her hand. Suddenly he felt her tiny hand swinging his gently to and fro.

"I remember your name," she said. "Only a little while ago . . . I didn't say 'Oh!' so that they shouldn't think anything bad about you."

He noticed that there was an angular gap between the centre incisors of her upper jaw.

"You are a friend of M. d'Estange," she said.

He looked at her attentively.

"Because he said yesterday that he would like to sit next to you to-day," she explained. "But I must go after Papa. How does one say it? He is making pedagogic experiments. Well, after all . . ." And making for the smoking-room she laughed, turning her face to La Roncière. Her laughter was silent; she pressed her lips together, and her breath puffed through her nostrils, while she lifted her head a little and raised her eyebrows, as though she was trying to avoid laughing behind someone's back. Emil noted this with surprise. Every moment, it seemed to him,

he was noting something fresh; for example, as she moved one seemed always to hear her dress rustling.

"By the way," she continued, standing in the doorway and looking about her, "I am seventeen already." The General was not in this room, but in the next, which was the music-room. Jacquemin, however, was here, and was telling a story to several of his fellow-officers. Marie entered the room.

"You wouldn't have thought so?" she asked over her shoulder, as she turned away. Then she slipped into the circle, accepted a chair with thanks, and at once listened eagerly to the story. Emil remained on the edge of the group. Marie's fiery-red ear was turned towards him. Absent-mindedly, without at first looking for a chair, he too began to listen to a fragment of a hunting adventure.

The adjutant was in great form; he was revelling in his element. The slim-waisted dandy, who always exhaled a scent of expensive hair-oil, knew only one passion: the chase. He was taking great pains to tell his story brilliantly. His white hands discreetly emphasized his discourse, which bristled with technical terms. In the hollow of his right hand a pocket-brush was concealed, and now and again, with nervous haste, as though involuntarily, he passed it over his

shaggy eyebrows. The consciousness that his smooth face was adorned by such eyebrows, which seemed to him unspeakably untidy and absurd, never left him, and spoiled his satisfaction in his well-groomed person.

At the sound of the piano in the next room he immediately wrinkled his forehead, and then, as a clear tenor was heard, he suddenly hurried through the end of his story, with an aggrieved expression, and with exaggerated politeness, as though the whole affair was of no consequence. To Emil this exhibition of vanity seemed extraordinary. The others, too, were disagreeably affected, and tried to pass the matter over by sticking vivaciously to the subject, and beginning a conversation about hunting in general. Emil, however, broke in rather crossly: "The only thing I can understand in this passion for the chase," he said, "is that it is pleasant to wander through the forest." The adjutant, with a gesture, expressed his feeling that one couldn't answer such a remark as that. After the others had turned round again he looked Emil carefully up and down. Suddenly he clapped his hand on his knee.

"Ah, Monsieur . . . La Roncière," he said, with great amiability, gracefully rising, "will you allow

me . . . so that we don't forget it? Only a trifle of official business. . . ."

The others drew back at once, and La Roncière stood silently at attention.

It had struck the General that Emil was still going about in the uniform which he had worn in Cayenne instead of that of the Lancer regiment to which he now belonged. Of course, the change would be difficult to make in a place where the regiment was not stationed, and Emil had not yet reported himself at the regimental headquarters. He, Jacquemin, had explained this to the General, so that for the time being all that he need do was to go to the office, where he could get the General to sign a permit to wear his present uniform during his term at Saumur. And Captain Jacquemin gracefully waved his hand. Emil bowed his thanks. This little dandy with the irreproachable manners was getting on his nerves. The adjutant, with a certain affability, was just about to change the subject, but was interrupted.

An assiduous group of officers, coming from the music-room, in the door of which the Baron also now appeared, came hurrying by them in search of Marie; they wanted her to play accompaniments on the piano. She could not sing. She went obediently to

the piano, and the guests all gathered about her to listen to the music. A young tenor, who had sung before, sang again. He had no *piano* notes, but that did not matter; Emil, at all events, never noticed the defect.

Once more he observed Marie. She seemed to be absorbed in the music. She was doubtless one of those persons who do whatever their hands find to do, whether the task be great or trivial, with all their might; that he had realized already. He leant back with a feeling of satisfaction and listened to the music.

Marie now played a few pieces on the piano. She played fluently, though somewhat carelessly; the emotional passages were impetuously emphasized while the rest of the piece was played in a sketchy and fanciful manner. The listeners applauded, and she went on playing. Presently she sprang lightly to her feet and closed the piano, and as though this were definitely the end of the performance all the guests who were gathered about her left the room. She did not thank them for their applause; she smiled quietly.

La Roncière remained behind. He went to one of the windows and raised the curtain; for a moment he was astonished to find the street was so near; the

room was on the ground-floor. In the darkness he could see only the lights of the bridge, and now and then the moving waters of the river; it had a green, stagnant look, and its flow was sluggish, as though it were thick and slimy. He heard steps approaching on the wooden pavement. He waited.

But before the steps reached the house Marie came up to him. She turned back in order to spread the cover over the piano; she had forgotten to do so. Then, taking a step towards Emil, she asked, watching him with her head on one side:

“It wasn’t anything very bad, was it?”

He understood immediately that she was referring to his conversation with Jacquemin. “You know, then?” he asked.

“You don’t suppose I listened!” she cried in girlish indignation; but she did not give him time to defend himself. “I expect you didn’t think,” she continued, referring to their previous conversation, “that I am already getting on for eighteen. But you know I am only just come from the convent, I think Papa told you that; but then I have still got a governess, after all. . . .” So saying, she stood considering for a moment, and he waited attentively; then, drawing nearer, she continued, vivaciously:

"My brothers are dead," she whispered, "or they would never have left me in the convent. But even here, not a single book; Mama's always begging me never to read. Truly," and she laughed with closed lips, "nothing but the Bible, and she's so proud of it. . . . But I used to think a lot in the convent," she continued; "one has such heaps of time for meditation. They force you to meditate—with the rod, would you believe it? And then one is always standing. Standing when everyone else is sitting down. You lose your right to sit—isn't there a word for it? Even at table, you stand and look on! And I have such an appetite," she confessed, with a queer little sigh. "Yes," she continued reflectively, "I did a lot of thinking then. They can force a child to stand in the corner, but can they force it to stand there willingly? You see, if they could do *that*——" and she held a small didactic finger, and once more spoke with childish fervour. "But that they can't do; they can't break the will. Now, when I come to have children. . . ." She disregarded his smile; no, she was not jesting; she was absolutely in earnest; he felt guilty, and at once became serious. "For example, if you tie a child's wrist to the bars of the window with a bit of yarn, he can easily tear himself loose,

but he must not! That isn't quite what is wanted either, but it is more like it. Somehow. . . ." She seemed to be lost in thought. Then, "All that does interest me so," she added suddenly, beaming at Emil. As she stood before him she was rubbing the palm of one hand with the knuckles of the other. Then, so quickly that the thing was done before he knew what was happening, she had reached up to his eyes, and was holding an eyelash with her finger-tips and blowing on it. "I'm wishing something," she explained, and laughed her silent laugh.

"I should like," she said, "to show you the house," and she picked up the lamp that stood on the table; "but there is nothing more down here, and upstairs we should disturb Mama. There's only Mama's drawing-room here." She threw open the door nearest to them and held up the lamp. "And then, beyond that, Papa's office. Papa has an office here in the house," she said. She looked up at Emil and away again. "Yes, it's more convenient for him," she added. Side by side they stood by the open door. Marie held up the lamp and Emil gazed absently into the room, which was upholstered in blue-grey silk. Then Marie stood on tiptoe and pulled at Emil's sleeve, so that he had to bend his head. "I want to

tell you something in confidence," she whispered in his ear, and she moved quickly and lightly back into the room, set down the lamp, and turned back to Emil.

"I do talk a lot, don't I?" she said, in a tone of depression. "Yes, but do you know why that is?—because at other times I'm hardly allowed to speak at all," and she nodded mournfully at her astonished listener. "We had a sister in the convent, Sœur Simone, who was very ill. I was fifteen then, and we were strictly forbidden to make a noise outside her cell. But I stumbled just outside her door, and suddenly she jumped out of bed and came to the door and made me take a vow of silence as a punishment. And that evening she died. For days after that I wasn't allowed to speak; at last the Mother Superior released me from the vow; but really only the person who has inflicted the punishment can do that, and, of course, Mother is perfectly well aware of that, and even when she doesn't say anything definite. . . . But Sœur Simone, after all, is dead!" She broke off. "It is dreadful, though!" she said suddenly. She spoke the last words precipitately; then she moved aside and once more rubbed her knuckles against her palm.

Emil opened his dry lips. "Come, come!" he began consolingly. Marie turned to him again; she was now quite collected. "They'll be wondering where we are," she said, swallowing, and without another word she preceded him. "No one will be wondering where I am," said Emil with a laugh; but the words escaped him like a cry of distress. Then Marie turned to him once more. She laid the tips of her fingers together, and said with a beseeching look, "Don't!" and hurried away.

Emil remained where he was; he felt stupefied. He looked about him and drew a deep breath, and unconsciously he pressed his hands to his breast, as though feeling for something. The candles were burning yellow; they gave out a faint heat. "What did all that mean?" he muttered. Suddenly he felt a longing to talk to someone.

In the smoking-room he found D'Estange, who was pouring a liqueur for himself. From the nearer drawing-room, where they had been received, came a confused sound of voices; all the other guests were there, glass in hand; they were looking at portfolios of prints which the General had collected on his travels. Emil suddenly had a feeling that D'Estange had been keeping an eye on him all the evening.

Nevertheless, he went straight up to him. "The mother," he asked, "tell me, what is the matter with the mother? And what is this about dead brothers?"

"I will tell you later," replied D'Estrange and passing his arm lightly through Emil's he led him into the farther room. He was not surprised at the question.

A general feeling of comfort and sociability now prevailed; a sense of mutual understanding. It was getting late; the guests were in high spirits; they were "just among themselves", and were conscious of their solidarity. Since Marie had disappeared (she had gone without bidding them good night) they were feeling confidential and communicative, and the certainty that whatever one said would be understood by everyone was as good as a draught of wine. It was a time of laughter and noisy comradeship; they were all brothers, and they chaffed one another like schoolboys, and yet there was a general tendency to speak of serious and interesting matters. The General, his leathery skin scarlet, was moving among his guests well pleased.

"Tremendous-looking fellow, the General!" said La Roncière.

"Like a general in a picture-book!" said D'Estrange, laughing.

He, too, seemed more communicative and more genial, and Emil had the benefit of the change. Perhaps his curiosity was really at the bottom of his change of attitude; perhaps he was only making an effort to be genial; at all events, they were drawn together by a sense of expectation, and this understanding increased their mutual esteem.

The General, in his booming voice, said jokingly that he doubted "whether midnight was late for these gentlemen"; at the same time he made no effort to delay their departure, and the more discreet of his guests had already begun to leave; for he was still their commanding officer, despite his jolly humour.

In the open air the departing guests gave free vent to their high spirits. For most of them the way home lay over the bridge. They strolled along through the warm night, gossiping and bandying jests; the silence was shattered by roars of laughter; names were called from group to group, and while one was speaking all the rest stood still. The General was discussed. All were pleased with him, and a youngster who had attached himself to La Roncière kept on insisting that he was "tremendous." The house was extraordinary for a provincial town. . . . Jacquemin, who held aloof from the rest, in order not to compromise

his dignity, tried to pour cold water on their enthusiasm, but his effort had a contrary effect. The old man had locked up the ladies' drawing-room—only the ladies' drawing-room—one mustn't smoke there. He was in love with his wife. Bravo!

As for Marie, with all respect, she was exquisite. And suddenly her name was on the lips of all. Charming, that little Marie, really charming! So shy, and yet so engaging. A delightful girl! The youngster once more became insistent. Charming she might be, but she was prim and prudish. Hers was a cloistered charm. . . . One lieutenant spoke eagerly of his sister. A woman already, and about to become a wife. Actually a wife! Scarcely credible what a difference there is in women. . . . "In a word," cried La Roncière, "there are two kinds: those that marry and those that allow themselves to be married." This was greeted with shouts of delighted applause.

Jacquemin exhorted them, rather crossly, to be quieter. They had now come to crossroads. D'Estange came up to Emil. "We go the same way," he said. Someone began to chaff Emil. "What, aren't you at the Europe any longer, you who were so intimate there?"

"Alas, it's shut!" said Emil. He spoke with affected

seriousness, like a man condoling with himself.

"A propos of being intimate," said the adjutant, stroking his eyebrows with a gloved third finger, "how are matters prospering? Didn't I see you recently consoling someone there?"

"A propos of consoling people," cried Emil, smiling, "what success did you have with your house-breaking?"

Jacquemin's treacherous smile disappeared. "What is that about housebreaking?"

"The attempt for which you required your rope-ladder. Or was it a romantic adventure?"

"Neither was there a romantic adventure."

"Aha, you made the purchase only so that you might win the heart of the rope-maker's daughter," and Emil gave a nod of ironical comprehension, greatly to the amusement of the others.

"I have seen nothing of any rope-ladder," said Jacquemin angrily.

"And I suppose you have never seen the rope-maker's daughter either!" And Emil swung his sabre to the front, rested his hands on it, and straddled his legs, rocking gently up and down.

Jacquemin blinked at him for a moment, cleared his throat, saluted, bade him good night, and went his

way. Those who followed him soon recovered their high spirits; before they were out of hearing there was another burst of conversation, and then the voices were lost in the distance.

La Roncière and D'Estange walked on alone, keeping step.

"You really have a peculiar trick of making unnecessary enemies," said D'Estange, reproachfully.

"And the best of it is," said Emil, with amusement, "that I myself scarcely know the little girl."

D'Estange maintained a reproving silence.

After a time he asked: "Do you know that they are saying that you were transferred to Cayenne at the instance of your father?"

"No, I did not know it. It's quite possible. But no, I don't believe it!"

Emil understood the significance of the suggestion. It was the first confidence that d'Estange had permitted himself, and he accepted it gladly. Emil's notorious past had never been mentioned by Captain d'Estange. He had, however, contrived to show that if he had avoided any mention of it, this was not a matter of personal reserve; it was merely that he did not wish to seem obtrusive. At the same time he was willing to admit that he was interested in what he had

gathered from the general gossip. Emil thought this quite natural, and regarded his whole attitude as perfectly decorous and proper. He felt inclined to meet the other's advances now that the subject had been approached.

Again d'Estange broke the silence.

"Shall we go to my rooms for an hour?"

"We shall!" replied Emil.

They stepped out, their shadows moving obliquely along the walls of the houses. D'Estange was rather taller than Emil, but he did not look it, as he walked with a stoop.

“HERE, just hang your things up.”

La Roncière tossed his shako on to the clothes-hook on the inner side of the door and unbuckled and removed his sabre. D’Estance leaned his in a corner behind the wardrobe, where there was already a second sabre; he threw his shako on the window-

seat. He lit the lamp that stood on his desk, carried it to the table in the middle of the room, and drew the curtains.

"It's not much of a place to look at, even by daylight," he said. "An officer's den, like any other. Just a place to sit down in, as we all sit—and wait. Excuse me!" And he went into the adjoining room.

"Look here, I say, no more spirits!" cried La Roncière. "Aha, what have you got there? I should like some of that!" He could see, through the open door, that the other was busy with a glass and a bottle which had stood on the bed-table. He himself had already found a seat. "Oh, will you have some of this?" cried D'Estange. He found a second glass on the washstand and returned to the sitting-room. The bottle contained a mineral water. He filled the thick glasses.

"Ah, good!" Emil felt for his handkerchief. D'Estange pressed his to his mouth; the carbonic acid gas embarrassed him; he had emptied his glass at a draught.

"Yes . . . one waits," he repeated, and he too sat down. "My father has an estate in Péronne; one day, God willing, it will be mine."

"Is that so! Then my idea was wrong."

D'Estance made no reply. He was picking at the fringe of the table-cloth. "Well, for once I'll express myself precisely, so that you'll understand me," he said, with his old smile. Then he dropped the fringe. "Well, then, the daughter in question doesn't count; the mother counts, but she's not in question. How's that?" he added, as though he expected to be praised for his way of putting things.

"What do you mean—in question?" cried Emil in a surly tone. "Naturally the old lady isn't in question! But who was talking about anybody being in question?"

"She isn't old at all," said D'Estance with perfect composure. "She's a wonderful woman. Even those blockheads there realize that. Under other circumstances they would all—— But no, but no! The Baron idolizes her, and very rightly. Now, it's true, she too is growing grey. Formerly she didn't seem to have any age, despite her sons. Five blessings, five joys, so she used to call them. Now she never speaks of them. Haven't you seen the pictures in all the rooms, on all the walls?"

Emil silently nodded.

"She has surrounded herself with them. It is just the same in Paris. Our fellows can hardly understand

it. She wants to surround herself with their memory. There are the proofs—those portraits, and what you saw in the glass cases; I don't think they are intended to keep her grief awake, but . . . so to speak . . . a certain feeling, the feeling that something was granted to her; five blessings, five joys, that were then shattered. All the sons fell under the Emperor."

"Yes, yes," murmured La Roncière. "When He above us does for once in a way show Himself plainly"—and he fidgeted in his chair "one understands Him all the less."

"She is much nearer to all that than we are. We all feel sorry for her; we are sorry; that's obvious, if one knows her. Everybody would like to make her happy; not for himself, but so as to *know* that she was happier; but, after all, any idea we might have of making a woman happy—I don't mean merely on account of her age—it simply goes down . . . like falling over a cliff . . . I don't know whether I——"

"I understand perfectly," said Emil, and laid his hand flat on the table beside the other's arm.

Captain d'Estange poured out another glass of water, and moistened his lips in a manner that was vaguely ceremonious.

"During the war she was alone in Paris—Marie

came later, and very nearly cost her mother her life; that is, she was gradually left more and more alone, and at last the youngest went to Russia along with the others. Until then nothing had happened to any of them, neither to the father nor to the sons; and at last they were all away. At that time she used to go to communion very often—she still attends mass every day—and her confessor was one of the friars of a convent in the neighbourhood. Now, listen! One morning she went to communion and confessed, and as the priest was giving her the Host she felt that his fingers were trembling against her lips. Not a glance from her, not a movement; she waited until communion was over. Then she went to the priest in the sacristy; he tried to make some polite remark, and she stood there; she stood and waited. The old man faltered, and was disconcerted, but not she; and before a word was spoken her eyes asked him, and her hands, and at last her voice: *which?* Nothing more; only—which? Just that one word. She had learned everything in a single heartbeat, or so she believed as she asked—which? And while she asked she might be called happy, for there was no answer to that question. The five had fallen in the same battle. The Baron had written to the priest from the

battle-field, so that he might prepare their mother. But a woman like that! Can you conceive it? She had divined it in a moment."

"I can conceive of fate, so far as a man may." Emil spoke hoarsely, with lack-lustre eyes. "And after all, look you, she did *not* divine it; for the Lord God had contrived something that no one but He could have thought of. That's fine, fine, what you tell me of her; it's beyond one, of course; how things are, how it is that she goes on living, that only she knows. We human beings are often our own saviours. But it's easy for us to admire, easier, indeed, than to commiserate. If only it helped her to know that one admired her; but she won't even feel it, I believe. No, all we can do is to pity her; only that; only croak our commiseration." He sprang to his feet in excitement. Then—and it seemed as though he spoke to himself:

"I'm bad at arguing, at explaining things. I've learned nothing in my life, and not very much about my life. But one thing has always been clear to me: to be just means—to weigh possibilities; human possibilities and impossibilities. I'll give you a commonplace example. Years ago, when I was in the 1st Dragoons, I had a friend in the town. He was a doc-

tor in a lunatic-asylum that they had there. I used often to go there. It interested me—though that isn't the point. Once when he was on night duty he let me keep him company, and he took me with him on his rounds, so that it was morning before I got home. My landlady, an unpleasant person, asked me with a wink where I'd been again all night. Now mark this: it would have been absolutely senseless to have told her the truth. She *could* only believe I'd been with a girl; it was all she was capable of believing; to believe anything else, to believe even the truth, was for her humanly impossible. Over and over again, a thousand times over, we come up against that sort of thing; for what judge knows us any better than the woman who asked me that question knew me? We are supposed to believe that God knows us better. That is, that He permeates all things, and knows all things, and invites us to entrust ourselves to Him. But the limits of our insight, the limits of human possibilities, as regards believing and understanding—these He doesn't seem to take into consideration. Where is goodness to be found? I can't see why He puts difficulties in our way instead of working a miracle every year. If, now, these glasses were to be turned into iron, that would be quite in order. The

dispensation of Providence is merely a phrase when one's five sons lie rotting all together. Those who teach us that to Him our whole life is as a single moment would do better to turn the thing the other way round; to me every moment is my whole life. Before that all objections lose their meaning. I dare say that what I'm saying is very primitive, but when I try to imagine such a fate it's only as an afterthought that it occurs to me that I ought to admire the woman because she has been forced to become a martyr by a beneficent dispensation; but I deplore her fate, and I say that the so-called higher justice is simply a justice that no one understands—at all events, I don't; it is *too* high for me!"

The words broke from him like a challenge; he wiped his forehead with his hand, and strode up and down, as though oblivious of D'Estange. Then he stopped before his shako and sabre, and stared at them for a while, as though he did not see them; but then of a sudden he buckled on his sabre.

Captain d'Estange, who had sprung to his feet, stretched out his arm while still behind the table, and came forward as though on guard. He betrayed an unwonted excitement. Emil already had his shako in his hand.

“La Roncière, what sort of a man are you really?”

But La Roncière only smiled and silently shook his head.

“Thank you very much, D’Estance, and good night.”

And he drew the door to behind him.

ABOUT four o'clock on the following day Emil prepared to get the matter of his uniform settled. The weather was stormy. He struggled forward against it, and, having reached his destination, he sprang into the porch, meaning to recover breath before he entered the house. But there he all but collided with

Marie, who was on the point of letting herself in. He saluted her, and she smiled, a daring smile, because he had found her in the street alone.

"Can you see I've been crying?" she asked, opening her eyes wide as she turned to him. "I always cry when it is windy; I can't stand the wind."

He stood aside that she might precede him, and explained the reason of his coming.

"But you'll stay a little afterwards, won't you?" she begged; and when he hesitated, she cried: "Of course you will! You can quite well ask Papa," she whispered to him, "whether you can pay your respects to Mama. He rather likes that; you see, he's so fond of her." She slipped away.

La Roncière had himself announced, and was shown in to the Baron's office.

"That's quite in order," was M. de Morell's opinion, after listening to Emil's request. "But just write the application yourself, will you?" and he was about to make room for Emil at his writing-table. But La Roncière had already produced a written sheet, which he handed to the General, who said: "Got it ready? So much the better!" unfolded it, and carelessly looked it over; then he made ready to sign it.

Meanwhile there was a knock at the door, and Marie entered.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Papa!" she cried. "I am disturbing you. I only wanted to ask whether you wouldn't come——" She seemed to be bashful in La Roncière's presence.

"More work for you, M. l'Adjutant!" The Baron gaily showed her Emil's application. "Please to prepare duplicate hereof and make written record, of same in accordance with regulations——"

Emil hastened to protest that he could make the copy himself, but the General winked at him secretly. Marie now came up to Emil and held out her hand with a pretty air of decision. Then she applied herself industriously to her task. She wrote with hunched-up shoulders; her hair shone a coppery red in the sun, which was just then emerging from the clouds.

The General and La Roncière stood waiting. La Roncière inquired after the health of Mme la Baronne. The General thanked him; she was better. At this moment Marie, bowed over her copy, glanced eagerly at Emil. He had a request to make, whether he might perhaps take the opportunity of paying his respects to Madame? The proposal did not appear to dis-

please the Baron. "Certainly, since you are here, certainly!" he replied. "Though, as a matter of fact, I don't know whether my wife——"

"I will ask Mama, Papa. I've finished," Marie interposed, standing up. With her clenched left hand she held up her right forefinger, which was covered with ink. "I've inked it," she complained; "I must go and wash it."

The Baron beamed at her. "Go and wash it, my child, and ask," he said. She slipped out of the room.

After a brief silence Emil seemed to be considering something.

"But I don't want in any way to be a trouble," he said, turning to the General. The latter, however, reassured him jovially.

"No trouble at all, my dear fellow, don't worry about that!" he said, smiling. "I myself, unfortunately, must be off in a moment. Yes!" he nodded in reply to the other's movement. "You'll excuse me, won't you, if I ask you to wait a minute here?" and he opened a padded door. "In any case, Marie will bring you word directly," he said, raising his hand in a friendly gesture, and took his departure.

Emil found himself in the blue drawing-room which he had seen from the other side on the previ-

ous evening. And from that side Marie now returned. She had obviously been running quickly down the stairs. She slipped into a chair and invited Emil to take another.

“Well, you see? That’s capital! Now we shall have tea!” she said. “Mama will be visible,” she added. Emil was silent. He could not conceal from himself the fact that he was experiencing a strange expectancy; he found it difficult to keep to the point. Marie, as though she divined his thoughts, suddenly came and whispered in his ear: “I must tell you a secret!” Then she went back to her chair, but she moved it nearer to Emil’s.

“You know, Mama is curious about you. They’ve been talking about you; before this, and to-day, at breakfast, especially, because yesterday I ‘particularly favoured’ you,” she told him hastily, with a sort of restrained playfulness. “Papa was just a little bit anxious—there are, you see, scandals about you. But Mama says: it is her duty to exert a good influence over you, if she finds that she can do so; and ‘my daughter must not avoid him; my daughter must have the strength to——’” Marie broke off and laughed at Emil. Again he was almost startled by this silent laughter. But she must do more than laugh;

she bent herself double and beat her little fist upon her knee. "She must have the strength, have the strength!" she repeated, immoderately delighted, and flushing red with her histrionic emphasis. Then she threw herself back, out of breath, and flung out her arms. "But that needn't make any difference to us, as long as they don't begin fussing!" she cried, in a gay and friendly tone.

At first Emil refused to believe that this tone was genuine. He was irritated. But as soon as she read this in his face she felt insecure and suddenly embarrassed, and he encountered her pleading glance. Here, surely, there was no deception. What had he dared to suspect? To the devil with his beastly suspicions! He had wounded the child. But now that he had her bodily before him, in all her primitive completeness, what magic was this? She seemed to accept him for a boy of twenty. . . .

She struck his hand with two of her fingers; perhaps he had really held out his hand; at all events, she recalled him to his senses, and changed the subject, as though to banish his thoughts. But she still gazed at him earnestly.

"You will like Mama very much," she said. "Everyone likes her immensely. She is almost like a

saint. She is always wanting me to take after her, but it's difficult for me to be a saint."

There it was again! And he could not help becoming restive again. He was not used to this sort of thing; it was too much for him.

"Because if one is to become particularly holy one must have a sin on one's conscience," Marie explained with naïve profundity.

It gratified him to see himself thus abashed, and this time there could be no doubt that his depraved imagination had been to blame. And really, there was a great deal of sense in what the little girl was saying. Even to realize that seemed to lift him out of himself. He was trying to think of something harmless to say to her, but just then Madame la Baronne entered the room.

For a moment she stood still by the door. She gave one the impression of a person suffering from the cold. She was taller than her daughter; she had the same eyes, except that they were larger; intelligent eyes, in a thin, intelligent face. Her grey hair was a shade lighter than her grey dress; the dress was cut high in the neck; Emil was reminded of a grey stone image. Over it she wore a shawl, coloured like the bloom on a grape. Yes, she was old . . . yet as

though her youth had been, not consumed, but extinguished. She seemed like a picture of something incorporeal; and yet, with her first step into the room, her form impressed itself on the senses as a silent harmony, so that her coldness seemed less austere.

La Roncière had sprung up as she entered, and Marie too had risen to her feet. He bowed low over the cool, live hand of the grey figure. He was embarrassed, and yet he was anxious that she should be conscious of his reverence for her; for her fate came with her; he was subjugated by it. She bore it on her forehead; never had he seen the like; the whole forehead, to the temples, was criss-crossed with deep furrows.

She begged him to be seated again; her voice was grave and vibrant. She sat there before him, very erect; her cool and passive glance seemed to say that she had already formed her opinion of him.

She opened the conversation: "Captain d'Estange, I hear, is a friend of yours."

"If I may tell the actual truth," replied Emil, and he could have made no other reply, "I have never had any real friends."

"Why is that?" she asked, without surprise.

Just then the servant brought in tea; he did not hand it round, but only put down the tray. Marie was about to make the tea, but her mother, as though she had not noticed her intention, took her place at the table and made the tea herself; and even the few movements she made in doing so were eloquent of a self-control, an equilibrium so perfect—though tinged with a certain severity—that La Roncière could not take his eyes off her. Marie was once more cowering in her chair, and, as before, her eyes, of whose colour one could never be sure, moved incessantly from Emil to her mother and back again.

“How is that?” the Baroness repeated, when she had poured the tea.

He would not give her a superficial answer. He reflected. Then he said: “Friends are travelling-companions, and I cannot see the way I am to travel.”

“Is not your profession enough, then?”

“I have always been a man of extremes,” he confessed, “and in my calling it is more sociable to take things easily.”

To this she rejoined, with manifest good will: “I don’t think that the way one travels, as you call it, the way of this or that kind of activity, is so very important. The way, the calling, in which one decides

to pass one's life. Life itself is the way. It is not the duty that we choose for ourselves that is important, but the duty that comes to us. Life itself is a duty, and a very great and wonderful duty."

"That I don't understand," said Emil.

"It is a long while before one does understand it. But you have a presentiment of it already, as have many to whom youth is not a comfortable condition. Our whole life is only a dying, M. de la Roncière. . . ."

"Assuredly. Yet it has never really seemed so to me . . . it simply is so, as a matter of course."

"Then it really was so for you." He looked at her reflectively, with a smile that begged for indulgence. She waited. A shade of acidity on her features, an expression of impatience, eluded him. Then he nodded eagerly; he had followed her meaning.

"But what I was trying to say," she continued, "is that the man who has once conceived of life in that spirit knows that performance is not the important thing. One has enemies; that one cannot alter. But perseverance makes adversaries of them; it challenges them."

"Perhaps"—he interrupted her impulsively—"perhaps the reason why I have no friends is that I

have always been inclined to appreciate only the greatest; the greatest achievements, the greatest men; and really to respect only the greatest."

"And what," she inquired, "is the greatest?"

He responded with eager docility; like a school-boy he sought for an example. "For instance," he said, "Napoleon!"

"Good. So long as a man does not possess himself, he should cherish the image of another. A soldier—why not Napoleon? A man for whom women take the veil."

Emil was startled. He deplored his thoughtlessness. But Mme de Morell retained her composure. Her eyes were gazing into nothingness, out of arched orbits that were like dark, hollow shells.

"I knew him, of course, the Emperor," she said. "He was a man on whom a curse rested, and in his heart he knew that. He always behaved, or so it seemed to me, like a man who is concealing a defect; he blustered when others were merry; when others scolded, he raved; and he worked like a driven beast. He was not willing that his life should be a test; it had to be a landmark." She was playing with her only ring, a signet-ring of silver, worn thin with age; her only other adornment was a medallion of the

Madonna. "I often think of him," she continued. "It is as though we lived between two hands; the one slowly lifts us up, then the other drags us slowly into the grave. And that moment between the two hands, when we stand on the crest of the arch of life, that moment, in his insolence, he sought to make eternal; and then he slipped and fell headlong." She wrapped herself more closely in her shawl. "No, let no one wish to resemble him."

So far as he, as a Belgian, was able to judge. there was scarcely a trait of the Emperor's in the people. Perhaps a people can never resemble its great men; "otherwise," Emil observed, with a discreet smile, "they would not be great."

She nodded. "Christ also did not resemble the Jews."

Then she turned to her daughter: "But where is your Miss Allen, Marie?"

La Roncière considered her profile; there he could still trace something at once noble and youthful.

"I don't know, Mama; I expect she will come directly," replied Marie, laying her hands on the edge of the table. "She is getting my dress ready for the soirée."

"Already? To-day? That is good of her," said

Mme de Morell. "The soirée is next Sunday," she explained, turning to Emil. "We shall see you again then. . . ."

He rose quickly, with an expression of self-reproach.

"No, no!" she said protestingly "only I get tired so dreadfully easily." She smiled for the first time, and indeed the light seemed to have faded from her face. "If you will keep Marie company a little longer . . ." and she gave him a friendly hand. "Marie finds her own society tedious, and that is not good for her. Good-bye, M. le Lieutenant, good-bye!"

This time he kissed her hand without embarrassment. Once more the silent rhythm of her limbs, and then, without turning, she was gone.

Emil gazed after her, strode several times to and fro, with his hands behind him, stopped short, and again gazed at the door. He was conscious of a curious excitement. There was nothing about her of the type he knew so well, the type of the eternally youthful marquise; she was by no means well preserved. But what strength! That tolerant, forgiving maturity of hers was a power; it gave her authority. . . . He could not at once throw it off; he did not even wish

to; and suddenly it annoyed him that he must play the cavalier; it was intolerable that he must make conversation.

Meanwhile Marie had never taken her eyes off him. With half-open mouth she stood there, watching him expectantly, perfectly motionless, as though she wanted to see how long he would disregard her, how long he would continue his uncivil behaviour.

Suddenly he realized this, and went up to the table. "Your name is Marie," he said, sitting down. "That is my mother's name."

She sat down in her mother's chair. "Marie. To think you have remembered that!" she retorted sharply.

He overlooked this, and began to speak of his parents. And as always when he spoke of them he experienced a curious compulsion to embellish his account of them. He himself was carried away by his narrative, and he began to enjoy himself; Marie abandoned her attitude of reserve; his whimsical description interested her; she took part in the conversation; when he sought for a word she suggested one; presently she interrupted him and began to speak of herself. And now each took fire from the other; often they were both talking at once, and for

some minutes they became more and more talkative. Marie now found Emil tremendously sympathetic, and he lost himself in his invention, which only gained by contrast with the unhappiness of which Marie ever and again complained.

Was it shame or a species of pleasure in another's misfortune? He represented his father as a man whom one could but love and honour; he had been his leader in his youth, in those years on which everything depends, and even to-day he was his best friend. —Yes, he was greatly to be envied, Marie sighed. Her father was entirely dependent on her mother; he absolutely worshipped her; and although he was very nice to Marie. . . . “But, after all, you know. . . .” But she could see Emil's mother before her eyes. A woman so entirely of the old school, selfless and solicitous, yet always a lady. It was delightful, that secret anxiety about her darling; but in her quiet way she had said many things which would be precious to him all his life. Marie could well imagine that. A childhood like that was beautiful, of course. When she stopped to think. . . . Oh, not the convent! Yet at home it was ten times worse. Her brothers, only her brothers mattered. There was no talk of anyone but them; compared with them she

was nothing. She had to reverence her dead brothers. Mama demanded that of her. She would tell her about them for hours together. Even when she was quite a little girl her mother had insisted on devotion to her brothers, on silent recollection, and humility before the dead, whom she had never known. The dead brothers were stifling her; simply because they were dead, strangers of whom she had not the least idea, she was supposed to sacrifice her life to them. The house was crammed with pictures, with uniform buttons and epaulettes and shoulder-straps; with their hair under glass, and framed letters; with their last notebooks. And this would be so as long as Mama lived; and even when she was dead it had to go on just the same. For then she, Marie, was to be the keeper of these things. That was Mama's one aim in life. But in the meantime she was dying here. Wasn't her life like being in prison? With shadows keeping watch in the corners! But perhaps Emil would like some more tea—and with arrack? Of course! What was she thinking of! And she was about to fetch the decanter. Emil caught her by the arm; she sat down again; he released her arm, and said:

“Well, now we have told one another about ourselves.”

He drank the last few mouthfuls of cold tea, and covered the cup with his hand.

"That was very nice of you, very nice," she cried, and sprang out into the room.

He turned in his chair and followed her with his eyes. She was standing at the window, biting her lips; the window was full of pale sunlight. Suddenly he felt a great liking for the child—liking and compassion. The tone of her conversation with him had been convincing; but what was genuine in all that she said was hatred.

She summoned him with her eyes; she had gone up to a picture that hung not far from the window, an engraving of Venus unveiling.

"I don't understand," she said, "why old people are ashamed; old women, I mean. Why? What have they to be ashamed about? It's so funny! That young women should feel ashamed, that, of course, I can understand. Tell me——"

"But, excuse me, isn't that a very preposterous question? It's precisely the ugly people who can't help feeling ashamed. And youth, after all, is usually beautiful."

Incidentally, while he was speaking, she had once more plucked at his eyelashes, but without result.

She looked down at her toes. "An old father is very handsome——" she said, without completing her sentence.

Emil moved away from her, pondering. "But all this must be explained to your mother," he then said with decision. "All that you told me just now—that must simply be explained to her. After all, she is so . . . such a woman as she is . . . how could she fail to understand it at once?"

"Well, then, try. She likes you, and you yourself are so enthusiastic about her. . . ."

"How can I attempt such a thing?" he said defensively.

Yet it did not seem to him wholly impossible, and the conflict in his mind subsided as he reflected.

"I suppose you have to go now?" Marie asked.

"Yes; but my permit?"

"In there. Papa isn't back yet."

He went into the General's office and put the paper in his pocket, and as he was buttoning his tunic over it Marie came up to him; she was already quite friendly again. She went behind the table before which he was still standing and held out a miniature, which he himself had not noticed there. It was a portrait of the Baroness as a young woman. He

looked at it. It was a noble face, long-featured, but it did not give an impression of stiffness. He heard Marie lay something else on the table. He looked; she was holding a second miniature face downwards on the table, and her eyes were challenging him. He wanted now to see this second miniature, but Marie would not let him, and with her free hand she smilingly waved him away. In the end he gave in to her and went.

He went home in some excitement. When he came to look up his permit he found it was the copy he had put in his pocket. However, it was all one; the General had signed the copy as well as the original.

ONE morning that week it happened that Marie, as she entered the room where her parents were already seated by the tea-table, suddenly, like a short-sighted person, went up to the wall which her glance had swept as she had closed the door, stood still for some moments, passed her hand over her forehead, and

then, quite unembarrassed, went to the table and took her place.

"What is the matter? What was it?" asked her mother.

"Oh, nothing," replied Marie, and now that she spoke she was obviously embarrassed; she flushed, and turning to her father, she added: "I could have sworn there was a picture hanging there, quite a brightly coloured picture. . . ." She smiled at him.

Mme de Morell, gazing at her fixedly, interrupted her. "What does all this mean, Marie? You must tell us; what is the matter with you?" she inquired, half anxious and half annoyed. "Miss Allen, too, told me this morning . . . is it the old trouble again?"

"Yes; perhaps a little, Mama," replied Marie, speaking more and more quickly.

The reference was to certain attacks to which Marie had been subject in the convent from about her fourteenth year. At that time, however, they had not learned much from the reports of the Mother Superior beyond the fact that Marie had steadily refused, or had at least for some time refused, to sleep without a light. Now, however, Miss Allen had reported the same thing, and not this alone.

For her mother this warning was unnecessary; it

had not escaped her that Marie, for the last day or two, had not been her usual self. It seemed as though she was continually trying to conceal a secret anxiety. Suddenly she began to sit for hours at the window, sometimes gazing into space, sometimes sitting with bowed head and with a vacant expression on her face, which she tried to dispel, as though surprised in committing some offence, if anyone approached her.

"What is the little daughter thinking of?" asked the Baron.

"A butterfly sat here once, here in front of me, on the window-sill; it was when I was quite little," said Marie. "A wasp had stung it. All the afternoon it sat there with folded wings, quite motionless, because if it didn't move it could go on living. It sat there patiently and listened to something that was deep down inside it, deep down, where life goes on. . . . I was trying to do that too." With the tips of her fingers she gently tapped the thick network of veins on her father's hand, then quickly bent her head and brushed it with her lips. "Perhaps I shall find out something," she murmured as she did so. Her lips were hot. The Baron stroked her hair. "Crazy child!" he said, and turned away.

Suddenly, too, she began to wander about the house, aimlessly active; she wanted to take part in the housekeeping; she set in order a heap of dusty pamphlets which she had discovered somewhere; she rummaged in a trunk full of old remnants of stuffs; and once she was found on the flat roof of the house watching the maid, who was sprinkling the washing with a straw sprinkler.

At night, when she begged Miss Allen to give her a night-light, the governess, who was not an ill-natured woman, thinking that this was only a matter of passing anxiety, said: "Well, then, just light a candle. I will put it out when you have fallen asleep."

"But it's not because I'm afraid, Miss Allen," said Marie in self-defence; "on the contrary. I tell myself it's like a buoy that marks a sunken ship. One is so sunk in sleep, and there, where one will come up again, if anyone comes, there's a beacon burning, a signal: this is where I am to be found!" She gesticulated with humorous emphasis. "And if one wants to make sure that one can always be found, that is really rather courageous, you must grant that!" And she insisted: "You mustn't put it out!" Her eyes and hands were coaxing the governess to smile. "Well, Miss Allen?"

The other shook her head thoughtfully, yet a faint sign of amusement, a sort of weathered smile, appeared on her lips. This was enough to satisfy Marie, and she slipped into her room.

In the night the governess was awakened by a clattering sound from the girl's room. She rose from her bed and approached the connecting door, which, as usual, had been left ajar. But she did not enter the room; what she saw through the narrow opening made her stop short and gaze through the doorway in amazement. She could see, by the light of the candle, that Marie, in her nightdress, was sitting cross-legged on the carpet. Beside her lay an open box of toy soldiers, wooden figures as long as a finger, which she had spread out before her and in her lap; she had her paint-box beside her and was so busily employed in painting the soldiers a different colour that she did not look round, and heard nothing. In her eyes was something like a preoccupied tenderness; the skin of her face was tense and shining, and the modeling of her features seemed curiously distinct. . . . The longer Miss Allen watched, the more distressing to her became the vision of unthinking happiness which Marie offered. She crept back to her bed.

In the morning she found the box of soldiers hid-

den behind Marie's chest of drawers. She left it there, but she had no hesitation about informing the girl's parents of what she had seen.

The result of her report was a conversation of a kind that had often arisen between them since Marie had returned from the convent, but had never led to anything, as on each occasion the Baroness quickly left the room. "As a matter of fact," said M. de Morell, "we don't know anything about the child." She contradicted this with a gesture only; it was not clear whether by this she was enjoining silence or excusing herself, and when her husband, in his curt and clumsy fashion, expressed his opinion that all that was wanted was to love the child, she smiled at him; a smile of encouragement, but hardly a smile of assent; he, however, was not conscious of the distinction. "Of course," he said, "you must know her better than I; you are her mother." Her only reply was: "Yes, I am her mother."

M. de Morell once more decided that his wife's opposition was explained by the fact that her wishes in respect of Marie's future differed from his own. But on this occasion he was inclined to be more than usually indulgent, since it seemed as though he was to be victorious. He had, of course, no idea that his

wife was beginning to cherish the same hope, and with just as much reason. This resulted from the course of events, and also from a peculiarity of Marie's which her altered circumstances appeared to have evoked: a surprising pliability, a faculty of adapting herself to another's mood.

She had made her way into one of the attics, a room which she had formerly never entered, in which the weapons and uniforms of her brothers had been stored—such of them, that is, as it had been possible to obtain. On the following day she asked her mother for the key (she had secured it surreptitiously on the occasion of her first visit) and took downstairs with her a uniform coat of the colour she had given to her wooden soldiers, together with the wicker effigy on which it was displayed; and carrying the whole downstairs to her bedroom, she proceeded to polish the buttons.

Her mother joined her. "You are getting more and more peculiar, child," she said after a while, "actually more singular every day. I am afraid I must say singular, though perhaps I may venture to believe that there is going to be a change, and one that I may call praiseworthy. But haven't you a secret, Marie?" she asked affectionately. "A wish,

for example, a secret wish? Now, come, tell me!"

Marie confessed to a wish. "I should like, oh, I should so like to have some little creature, Mama; something to love." She pressed her hands crosswise to her breast. "A tiny thing of my very own!" she added, and suddenly she blushed such a flaming red that the Baroness, who saw the blush, was too astonished to answer.

Soon after this she was sitting beside her father at his writing-table, with her arm thrown about his neck, while he showed her a huge album containing plates of all kinds of troops in the uniforms proper to every sort of occasion. Eagerly he explained page after page; her questions were brisk and to the point. "Tell me, Papa," she asked in a tone of affectionate diffidence, "wasn't our youngest a lancer, too?" The old man nodded. "I recognized that at once," she continued, passing her hand over the brightly covered figures that lay before her. "I was cleaning his uniform only to-day." Meditatively she put her head on one side. "It would about fit me, Papa, don't you think, if I could put it on? I believe there's going to be a fancy-dress ball this year. Don't you think I should look nice—as a brigand's bride, or something of that sort?" And she gave her father a playful hug.

"But, Marie," said the General, after an almost imperceptible pause, "you know yourself, don't you . . ." He looked quickly at the door, and turned the page. Marie rose and left the room; she had the impression that someone had rung.

Even if the door-bell had rung there was no need for her to leave the room; and, as a matter of fact, she was mistaken. But in the following days she was often subject to this illusion. She was constantly thinking that she heard the front-door bell, and even though she did not go downstairs on every such occasion, one might have guessed, from a certain inanimate quality in her bearing, what was amiss. Or at some time during the day she would find herself loitering aimlessly in the outer hall, and there she would remain until she was questioned. On several occasions she was even discovered outside the house, leaning on the parapet of the embankment, and another time she wandered along the quay, "just for something to do", as she declared unconcernedly as often as she was shepherded back to the house. Her restlessness increased and disturbed the whole household.

Her mother questioned her cautiously, but in vain. Marie remained inaccessible, chiefly because of a singular abstraction, which seemed to veil her from

others without her own knowledge, and at times by reason of a sudden talkativeness that came over her, and which was so discursive that nothing could be made of it, though her mother often allowed her to run on in the hope that she would betray something.—Did her mother know any Jews? asked Marie.—Yes; but why? What did she mean? rejoined her mother patiently.—They must be wonderful people.—Why was she so enthusiastic about them?—Because they were still waiting for the Messiah.—But that was not reasonable; how could she think it so?—Still, it often occurred to her.—“Because that He should have appeared already . . .” she continued doubtfully, and then, suddenly, with uncontrollable emphasis: “Oh, there’s nothing the matter, Mama, nothing. . . .”

Mme de Morell looked indignant, but no reprimand passed her lips. The look of fear and defiance on Marie’s face had given way to pallor; her face, with its closed eyelids, was empty of all this pallor; and her mother saw that the girl was mutely struggling to suppress a fit of crying. She rose, perplexed, and left the room.

Another day—it was a Saturday—Marie was still practising a few pieces on the piano for the soirée

which was to be given on the Sunday. From where she sat she could see through the window. Suddenly she broke off in the middle of a piece, and in such a manner that Mme de Morell, who was in the blue drawing-room, after listening for a moment, went in to her. Without even closing the door behind her, she hurried across the room to her daughter, who sat huddled together in front of the piano; on her face was the rigid expression of a person in an ecstasy. For a long while it was impossible to arouse her. Even the General, who had been summoned thither by the urgency of his wife's voice, was for some time unable to recall the girl to herself. At last, following his daughter's unmoving gaze, which seemed to be directed at something outside the window, he asked: "Was there anything outside there?"

At this Marie suddenly came to herself, and quickly, as though trying to disregard what had happened, she said, unconcernedly enough: "On the bridge. I thought I saw something. Nothing bad. Only . . ." She smiled; it was a pleading smile. She took a few steps towards the piano, but as she pushed her hair from her forehead they saw that she had to feel for support.

"Things can't go on like this, my child," said M.

de Morell very kindly. "Tell me, please, what you saw? Or whom you saw? Courage, Marie!"

Mme de Morell gently shook her head, as though to say, "That's not the way!" and said simply: "We are asking you to trust us, Marie."

Marie was apparently touched; she reflected. Then, lifting her head with a bold resolution that made her look perfectly bewitching, she said valiantly: "A man."

"So it was a man!" said the General in amused astonishment. "And perhaps the man was an officer!"

But Marie was reproachfully silent. Then he became serious again.

"Did he make signs to you, Marie?"

In reply to this Marie gazed severely at her father, and then looked on the floor.

Mme de Morell wrinkled her forehead.

"Who was it, Marie?" she asked.

Marie was silent. With her knees slightly parted, with pouting lips, she looked aside and slowly wrung her hands; and so doing she looked singularly boyish.

"Who was he? Do you know him?"

"N—no."

"Of course you do. Who was it?"

"I didn't recognize him."

"Answer me a little more properly, Marie, and look at me! I insist, do you hear? I must insist that you tell us who it was. You simply say that you didn't recognize him; that means you are not completely, absolutely certain who it was?"

"And if I were completely and absolutely certain," cried Marie, whirling round with sudden violence, erect and passionate, "if I were, I would never, just never tell you, never!"

Silence. The girl slowly recovered her self-control. She breathed deeply several times as though with a sense of relief. Then, for a moment, the ecstatic expression returned to her face.

Had she already an understanding with someone? And if not, what was the meaning of this partiality? That, at least, must be investigated. The parents exchanged a glance. Marie was cowering in an easy-chair. They left her there.

The Baroness consulted Miss Allen, but the governess could offer no explanation of what had occurred. It was plain that the girl had some secret; what had happened in the music-room fully confirmed her impression; but she knew nothing more definite; some-

times Mlle Marie seemed to be afraid and at other times expectant; yes, she seemed to alternate between dread and expectation; but it was impossible to detect anything more definite. She mentioned, however, one thing that she had noticed, namely, that during the last few days Marie had several times changed her linen, though without any reason; surreptitiously, but Miss Allen had been watching her; and it looked as though the girl were obeying a desire that had the force of a longing, an absolute craving. The Baroness received this information calmly. She implored the governess to be more watchful, and dismissed her.

A superfluous warning. Miss Allen could not be more watchful; she could do no more than watch. Had she not somehow felt that something unusual was about to happen? A superfluous warning for this night, at all events, when what she had felt to be imminent really happened and found her waiting for it.

Marie flew into the room with fluttering night-dress; her limbs were quaking, her lips were trembling, and Miss Allen made an involuntary movement of defence against the girl, who was like a hunted creature; but she was already climbing into bed with her knees. She stammered: "I am good—I am good," with a strange, pleading expression.

Miss Allen relaxed her straightened arm, and made a place for the child's head on her shoulder.

She did not ask for the reason of this disturbance; not, that is, for an external reason, for she knew that none existed. Miss Allen had grown old in the society of young girls, so that she had much experience of them. She had often known such incidents; yet this was more moving, and in some way more distressing than anything that had ever happened to her. Now what she had anticipated night after night had come; as far as she was concerned she could sleep again; for what more alarming thing could she imagine? Even she had her scrap of imagination, though it was carefully concealed, and her charge might be thankful for it.

"Marie?" she could feel that the girl's body was hot and dry; her knees were icy cold. Marie pushed her head backwards and looked at her with eyes in which the heat of her blood seemed to be focussed. She had licked and bitten her lips until the sharp edges were erased, and her mouth was like the mouth of a child who has been eating berries.

"I just wanted to ask you something, Miss Allen. Oh, Miss Allen!" she said thankfully, and she smoothed her hair and her nightdress a little. Then,

after a long silence, and after gazing again at Miss Allen, she breathed: "I wanted to ask you, Miss Allen, whether a lie told for the sake of another person is less wrong. Is it?" And again she buried her head in the pillows.

Miss Allen merely stroked her head. Not because she was at a loss for an answer. Dear God, no! But words could never express her meaning as fully as was necessary here; she had learned that by experience. Slowly she surrendered to her fatigue; at the same time she continued to stroke the girl, who trembled slightly now and again. Gradually the movement of the hand stroking her arm became drowsy, but Miss Allen's ear still noted that the girl's breathing was becoming more regular. Good, good; here, after all, was something she could do; just to go on stroking.

When Marie woke next morning in her own bed, Miss Allen had already decided that she would tell the girl's parents of the question the girl had asked her in the night, but nothing more. As for the rest, as for the whole incident, not a word of that would pass her lips. So she told herself; that was her way. But she could not find an opportunity. The fact was that Marie, who had already given displeasure by

her dilatoriness, for she was expected to get ready for mass, suddenly declared uneasily, and then with the utmost violence, that she wouldn't go—she wouldn't go out at all! She was afraid, she admitted, and now she spoke timidly again; she was afraid, "even with a lot of people." It was recollected now that during the last few days she had always contrived that she and Miss Allen should not go out alone, but at the same time as her father or Jacquemin, and had inconspicuously attached herself to them. All attempts to disregard her refusal as a mere caprice were foiled by her obstinate and speechless immobility after she had announced her intention. In the end Mme de Morell could ill conceal her irritation. Time pressed.

The General appeared, arrayed for church; he realized at once what was amiss, but instead of listening to his wife's complaints he first of all spoke indulgently to Marie. She remained stubborn; his indulgent representations failed to pierce her armour of silence as she crouched in her chair with clenched fists. In the end this was too much even for his equanimity. Gripping her arm, he forced her to stand up, and then released her. She stood slackly before him; several times a convulsive start ran

through her whole body; but she stood with hanging arms and merely looked at him with sad and apathetic eyes.

"Listen to me!" he said with decision: "I don't allow you to play with us. I won't permit you to torment your mother. I insist that you shall be open with us!"

Marie silently unclosed her hand; a paper fell on the table. "Yesterday evening," she whispered. "By the manservant. . . ."

It was a soiled scrap of paper, rolled up and closed like a cartridge. The Baron opened it, read it, and let it fall again in silent inquiry. Then he opened the door and shouted:

"Samuel!"

The manservant appeared.

"Who brought this note yesterday?"

"A woman."

"What sort of a woman?"

"An old woman."

"Who was she?"

"I don't know her, Monsieur."

"Did she say nothing?"

"Nothing at all, Monsieur."

The Baron shut the door in the servant's face.

Meanwhile Mme de Morell had gone to the table and read the note, and then Miss Allen. There, in untidy characters, were written the words: "Disdainful angel, fear my revenge!"

"What does it mean?" asked Mme de Morell at last.

The Baron was once more examining the note. "There is something at the back of this, Marie?"

She clasped her forehead with one hand. She had not wanted to tell anyone, she said in a toneless voice; she had felt ashamed. As a matter of fact, there had been a letter before this; what was more, it had been laid among her sewing the day before yesterday. She had simply put it aside. . . .

"And that letter, too, was unsigned, like this?"

"It was more carefully written. Yes, it was signed only with a capital R."

"And how should the writer know whether you——"

"How you do question me!" said Marie in distress. "It said there, I was to go out at three o'clock. He would know by that whether I was willing . . . whether my affection——"

The General was no longer listening. "Such things," he said, "such things as this . . . there's no

end to them once you let yourself be drawn into them. That," he said, turning to them all, "is why I am asking so many questions. I am looking for a clue." And after reflecting a moment he said briskly: "If a letter was laid on the sewing-table one of the servants must be involved." Miss Allen prevented him from ringing for the servants. She ventured to observe that it would be wiser to behave as though they had no suspicions, in order to detect the culprit more easily. That, the Baron admitted, was obvious.

"I think we will let the matter drop," said Mme de Morell after a pause.

Then the Baron started; he turned about quickly and addressed his daughter:

"Marie, who was on the bridge? Well? Now then, without evasions, please!"

Marie turned pale; she stood there like a ghost.

She met her father's gaze with candid eyes. Her features betrayed her pitiful effort to be brave; yet, when she spoke, the name seemed to slip out against her will:

"La Roncière."

And even as her mother cried: "But, my child, why shouldn't he be!" she was sobbing: "I'm making a mistake! Perhaps, after all, Papa darling, I'm mak-

ing a mistake! I don't really know, I couldn't see, by the holy Virgin I couldn't see exactly!" She leant against the wall, her face wet with tears.

Gradually the Baron found his tongue. "La Roncière?" he muttered, his hands behind his back. "Eh, the devil! After all one had heard. . . . I don't want to be unjust, not on any account, but if it's he it's a simple matter. At all events, I'll just see Jacquemin. . . ."

But here the Baroness went up to him. "I beg you to take no notice of what she says," she said in a decided tone. "I ask you, and I have a right to ask you, because the whole affair is altogether of a private nature. A puerile trick; we shall take no notice of it, whoever may have played it."

It was the Baron's experience that he had never done amiss in submitting to his wife when she spoke in this tone. He hesitated awhile, obstinately shook his head, and then promised to hold his tongue and to behave as though nothing had happened; a decision of which Miss Allen approved.

ACCORDINGLY, La Roncière, quite at his ease, appeared amidst the throng that filled all the rooms that evening. Even the ladies' drawing-room was thrown open to the guests, for to-night the civilians and the officers were to meet. Emil, at the side of Ambert, with whom he had arrived, finally came to a standstill beside a group which offered him the oppor-

tunity of greeting D'Estange, Marie (who sat smiling in the centre), and the General, who, for the moment, was diverted from his duties as a host by the merry scheme which had just been hatched. This referred to Jacquemin, who was not yet present; it seemed as though he was going to be really late; an unheard-of offence in him, who was always punctuality personified. They were joking about the worthy Jacquemin and his eternal and unyouthful anxiety lest he should fail in the slightest point of duty. Marie had a splendid idea, and at once devised a little plot against him. She had met him that day as she was coming home from church with Miss Allen; she had met him, but he had not noticed her. And now, when he came in, they would behave as though they had already been discussing the matter, namely, that Jacquemin, for some incomprehensible reason, had that very afternoon, in such and such a street, passed Marie and Miss Allen without taking the slightest notice of them, although he must have seen plainly enough that they were being annoyed by two drunken men or other objectionable persons. . . . All gaily agreed, but Marie was quite ravished with the idea. She could imagine Jacque-

min's face, his helpless gestures, his assurances; she apportioned speeches to each of the conspirators, which she pronounced with an expression of tragic solemnity: "What is this we hear? You, of all people! Incredible! My dear fellow, even if it were a matter of two *strange* ladies!" and: "This may cost you your collar, Jacquemin!" And, last of all, she turned to her father: "Papa, you must say to him, very sternly: 'I should never have thought it of *you*!'" Excellent, excellent, he would say it and look black as he said it. "But after supper, don't you think? Everything after supper," the General begged; he was already hurrying from the room. Marie clapped her hands and drummed on the floor with her feet; she was beside herself with delight. "He will be like a dog with his tail between his legs!" she cried, waving one hand in the air and pressing the other to her lips. "*Mon Dieu*, he will be like a dog with his tail between his legs!" The company thought her high spirits adorable. Emil, D'Estance, and Ambert moved on.

After supper they were once more standing together, when Marie hurried by them. "Now's the time! Look out! Jacquemin!" she cried in passing.

They saw her whispering as she went; from time to time, baring her teeth, she rubbed her left palm with the knuckles of her right hand.

"She has thawed quickly," said D'Estance.

"She's a wonderful little person, I must say—little lady, I mean," Ambert corrected himself.

"And she will be a great lady, you may be sure," said Emil. "What makes her seem so curiously unconventional now is her tremendous thirst for knowledge. She wants to understand everything, she wants to take an interest in everyone——"

"And for everyone to take an interest in her," said D'Estance jocosely.

But Emil, instead of smiling, as D'Estance had expected, said rather superfluously: "Oh, of course, I meant intellectually."

To this D'Estance rejoined rather drily: "I suppose you would define a lady as one who doesn't marry, but allows herself to be married."

"Listen to this, D'Estance! She said to me: 'I am really living as if I were in prison!' And she didn't for a moment even *think* 'Take me out!' or anything of that sort."

"But that doesn't mean," said Ambert, "that there are not ladies"—and he suddenly began to smile—

"among those that are more inclined to marry than to be married."

"Naturally," said D'Estange. "What are you smiling at? That is perfectly true, but what is there to laugh at?"

"I am not laughing," said Ambert, grinning; and in the end he had to turn his back on the others.

D'Estange shook his head. They had lost sight of Marie. At this moment an orderly entered.

"M. le Lieutenant de la Roncière?"

"Here I am," said Emil.

"M. le Général wishes to see M. le Lieutenant."

Emil excused himself and followed the orderly. The man led him down the corridor and opened the door of the General's office; having admitted Emil, he shut the door from outside. The General was standing, and it seemed to Emil that the old man flushed crimson as he entered. In the background stood Jacquemin with rigid features. Emil hesitated; he was not quite sure what particular degree of formality would be in place here. But M. de Morell did not appear to be standing on ceremony. He said immediately, with enforced calm:

"For particular reasons I request you to leave my house. Take yourself off."

Without speaking a word Emil left the room. He did not return to the company; he took his shako and sabre from the anteroom and went out into the street.

After a while he came to his senses. Why had he not demanded an explanation? That wasn't in the least like him. And it wasn't like him, either, to run off under a cloud in this aimless way. He ought to have told his friends; his friends. . . . Well, then, little Ambert. And he decided to go and see little Ambert. Ambert would see at once what a mistake he had made; he would ask him questions; he might even be able to explain the affair. . . . How was it that he wasn't more anxious to have it explained? He was conscious of something very like a profound aversion from the whole matter; the spurs were in his flanks, yet he did not feel them; the joy of battle had deserted him. Was it that he was weary or had he a premonition? But, the devil, a premonition of what? The first thing to do was to learn what was afoot! He couldn't let himself simply be turned out like that! There was some mistake—that went without saying; that would soon be put right. But he must learn just what it was before he worried himself about it. . . .

With such thoughts in his head he came to Ambert's lodgings. He went upstairs; the landlady, an amiable creature, knew him and showed him into the room. He made himself comfortable and prepared to wait.

In many respects the little room was like that other which had seen the beginning of their friendship. Here, however, their relation had taken on a new character; it had become at once more assured and more affectionate. Ambert seemed to him a companion in misfortune, for he, too, regarded the order to take the higher course of instruction as a doubtful honour. But however unpleasant the realization of this fact might be to the keen soldier, he regarded his fate submissively, and even took pains to let this be seen, lest Emil should think him conceited, though only when he was alone with him. And it was just this modest expression of confidence that touched Emil; to him it was pathetic to see how Ambert at once assumed a different attitude in the company of any third person, giving it to be understood that his presence in Saumur was merely a matter of course, or, at least, that it appeared to him to be perfectly in order.

Emil, leaning back in an easy-chair, recalled all

this to mind, and he felt himself drawn to the little man—really, he thought, as he had never yet been drawn to any man. Men—and this was a curious thing—had always expected him to behave strangely. And now had he once more stood before one of them, before one of the rich and powerful, with his head, as it were, secretly bowed, as though he himself were not a man, but . . . what? He clacked impatiently with his tongue and sat up in his chair; his back had almost gone to sleep. “A lieutenant!” he groaned wearily.

But then the door of the room flew open and Ambert, all in a glow, stood on the threshold and looked cheerfully at Emil. “I thought you would perhaps . . . that . . . in any case, I left early,” he said, and entered.

“Very good of you; one can always rely on you. And now?” Emil took the other’s hand. “What have you got to tell me?”

Ambert was silent for a moment while he changed his coat.

“You noticed, then, that I had gone?” asked Emil.

“Of course, and I asked Jacquemin. . . .”

“My dear fellow, please; don’t get me anything,”

said Emil, as Ambert stood before him irresolute.

Ambert acquiesced. He sat on the sofa and smoothed the table-cloth with his hand.

"But you might have drawn the line at that, La Roncière," he began; "after all, a man has so much self-control."

"What?" asked Emil without emphasis. He rose and took a chair.

"Well, you made that remark——"

"What remark? I made a good many remarks."

"It's to be hoped not!" said Ambert, smiling uncertainly.

"What remark?"

Now Ambert summoned up his courage. "Well, of course, the remark you made to Marie Morell; what else?" he replied.

"She has been confiding in you, has told you?"

"This is no laughing matter," said Ambert, raising his eyebrows. "One simply doesn't permit oneself to let oneself go like that. The little thing was quite horrified."

"Some beastliness, no doubt?"

"Oh, come, I ask you, what's the good of all this?" retorted Ambert with some impatience. "We should

do better to talk seriously. What you have said is all one to me; what I am concerned in—for your sake—is the scandal.”

“To come to the point: was no one told the exact words?”

“The actual remark? Of course not. What do you take the Morells for? Besides . . . it wasn’t precisely drawing-room language,” he said in friendly reproach. “All they know is that the thing was said, and there’s obviously no getting away from that; and the things that were said about it weren’t particularly nice.”

Emil suddenly snapped his teeth together.

“And that’s what I was turned out for?”

“What else could it be?”

“What else? He simply stares at me!” cried Emil, and crashed his fist on the table. “It doesn’t dawn upon him, he doesn’t even dream that there may be foul play! What else! Instead of facts there’s a black hole, but the others spit into it, so he spits too! *Assez, mon frère!*”

“I only asked, La Roncière.”

“Ach! You were convinced from the outset!”

Then little Ambert spoke out. “Don’t be angry, La Roncière, if I beg you to be reasonable. Don’t be an-

noyed with me, please, if I speak quite candidly. Don't let us quarrel when we must take counsel together . . . we ought to, that is . . . if you will. . . . It was my intention to bring D'Estange, but . . . You know what I think," he added, and coloured.

Emil had to some extent composed himself; he looked at the little man frankly. "Of course. I beg your pardon, Ambert. And, after all, it's better that we should be alone."

Ambert strung himself up for an effort; the wrinkling of his forehead betrayed as much. "There is only one thing," he said slowly, "and it occurred to me just now that for that reason . . . Think, if you deny it, who you——"

"Deny it?"

"Good God, I am simply trying to say: who is accused of lying. . . . Now, look here. . . . This will need delicate handling. You haven't written any letters too?" he asked; the thought suddenly occurred to him.

"What sort of letters?"

"Well . . . or *a* letter. There was some talk of one. Now don't get excited! Truly, I don't know anything more; I don't really know now. . . . Oh yes,

now I know. I believe the girl—yes, it was the girl herself who told me something.”

“Ambert, what is it they want of me now?” said Emil tonelessly.

“No, no. It’s only that I heard . . .”

But La Roncière slowly rose to his feet; with his left hand he clutched the edge of the table, and his right hand he stretched over the table towards Ambert, who gazed at him nervously. He had something more to say: “Ambert, what is happening there? What is it that is coming upon me? Something horrible. This is going to be an ugly affair, Ambert,” and he added, mysteriously: “Even a ray of sunshine is a flash of lightning.” Then, as though ashamed of his outbreak, he quickly drew back his hands, turned away, and began to pace to and fro.

This went on for some time. Ambert moved to the corner of the sofa, where he was nearer to the rambling figure, and followed it with anxious eyes. But Emil seemed by degrees to grow more composed. “We’ll sleep on it, my dear fellow,” he said at last, interrupting his perambulations; he spoke in an easy tone, and began at once to get ready for his departure. With his shako and his sabre under his arm, he once more began pacing to and fro;

then he went up to Ambert and held out his hand.

“It is curious, you know,” he said, “how my theory—I’ve held it a long time—has so far always been confirmed: God won’t let things be as bad as that! A childish belief, I know, but every time it has happened that things began to look blacker and blacker, and then, in the end, they weren’t nearly so black after all. And yet, actually, I’m constantly on the watch to see whether one day the trap won’t close on me and everything be just as ghastly as it has seemed. But perhaps that is just death.”

The little man on the sofa raised his head and lifted his hand to take the hand held out to him, and asked softly:

“La Roncière! What sort of a fellow are you really?”

But La Roncière merely gripped his hand and shook it, and hastily he left the room.

ON the following evening Captain d'Estange appeared before his commanding officer at an unusually early hour.

On asking the servant to announce him he had explained that he had come on the most urgent business, and although old Samuel, when he entered the

room, saw that his master and mistress had barely finished their breakfast, and although he disturbed them in the middle of a lively altercation, on being informed that Captain d'Estange was waiting for him M. de Morell followed close on the heels of his servant.

"What can I do for you, my dear D'Estange? No need to apologize; just tell me what brings you here."

The General sat down before his writing-table, while D'Estange took the chair offered him.

"M. le Baron, I really find this quite extraordinarily painful. I am here, so to speak, on a preventive errand. I have received certain information."

"In what form?"

"Conclusive. A letter."

"Just show me the letter, D'Estange, unless there is any special reason why you should not do so; that's the quickest way of coming to the point."

"No reason whatever. Allow me." And D'Estange handed the letter to the General. "It came this morning."

"And how?"

"By the local post."

The Baron read:

I will no longer endure the insolent coolness with which you are lying in wait for that fat mouthful—that is, for Marie Morell's money. I have written her a letter. My passion gave me words which are as true as you are despicable. But I have signed the letter with your name. I have insured that it will come into Marie's hands, for I have bribed one of the servants with five francs. Alas for you, if she takes fire from this amorous effusion!—R.

The veins were standing out on the Baron's forehead. He laid the letter on the table and placed his hand upon it.

"It has already come," he said, and the two men looked at one another.

"It was in the house," continued the General. "It was given to Marie. Not a doubt; the same handwriting. Have you any suspicion, D'Estance?"

D'Estance nodded.

"Well, I had better confess to you at once," began the General, after a moment's consideration. "I have a suspicion, or rather, an hour ago it became a certainty. I won't conceal anything from you, D'Estance; we all know your handwriting, and we saw that it wasn't yours; all the same, when Marie brought me that letter early this morning—one is confused and excited at such a moment—I ransacked my papers

to see whether I could find anything of yours, which might perhaps enable me to detect the disguise. . . . You understand that, don't you, and you won't take it amiss? And, after all, that was before you came. . . . Well, while I was searching and turning my things over I came upon a document which, by incredible good luck, happened to be among my papers, and which I wasn't really looking for at all, or if I was, it was only half-consciously; and how I came to lay my hands on it doesn't matter at the moment. Well, there's no question of any disguise; it's precisely the same hand. And now at last I'll tell you. The writer of this letter is La Roncière." And he tossed the letter back to D'Estance.

D'Estance sprang to his feet. His long face turned yellow. "Infamous!" he hissed. Then he pulled down his tunic and said: "I will take the matter into my own hands, of course."

But the General was opposed to this. "Now see, D'Estance, I expected that, and on that account I would rather have kept silence. Please, please sit down again. I can't forbid you to fight a duel; as an officer, I am not permitted to forbid you. Nevertheless, I would beg you, as our friend, to take no steps for the present. I am asking you this in the name of

my wife as well. It was she who, quite independently of you, first really made the matter plain; in an affair of this sort she sees so much more clearly. Naturally, steps must be taken, and will be taken, but we want to wait a little. This is only for Marie's sake; that goes without saying. We should prefer to avoid a scandal; that there should be any talk at all is disagreeable enough. Now then. D'Estange, can I count on this, that you will leave it to me to intervene and to decide when and how?"

"Since Mlle Marie is involved," said D'Estange civilly, "—and I feel ashamed, M. le Baron, that you should have to remind me—the whole position, of course, is altered, and it goes without saying that I will do as you wish. But apart from the point of honour—and I know that my honour is safe in your opinion, even if for the time being I take no steps, and that is chiefly what I was thinking of—apart from all this, there is something else which the incident forces me to take into consideration, and something, if you will excuse my saying so, that concerns me very closely. And if I, M. le Baron, in addition to what you have said with regard to your daughter, may venture, for my own part, to mention something in this connection——"

"Please, please, only go ahead, my dear D'Estange," cried M. de Morell in some astonishment.

"It cannot be indifferent to me, M. le Baron, what is written in this letter, seeing that my name——"

"Yes, yes; if you wish, D'Estange, you shall read it. Only I should have preferred to spare Marie that. It is a tasteless 'amorous effusion,' as he himself has written to you."

"Certainly, M. le Baron! That, too, hadn't occurred to me. I should be the first to respect the consideration to which you allude only too pertinently. For what perturbs me is precisely the fact that such a letter is a profanation, an anticipation, if you will permit me to say so, and its serious character may deprive and perhaps irretrievably destroy something that is as yet inarticulate, and to a certain extent unawakened——"

"My dear D'Estange, never mind that," interrupted the General, who did not appear particularly willing to discuss the subject further. "Time gives counsel, and the danger which you have just—what shall I say?—which you have just taken into consideration, is, in my case, already removed; we have made sure of that. So don't trouble your head about that. And now good-bye, and keep your own counsel,

and if there should be anything fresh come and tell me."

Captain d'Estange, now quite reassured, once more confirmed his promise and took his leave.

M. de Morell, however, went in search of his wife in order to inform her of his conversation with the captain. Even she could hardly doubt La Roncière's guilt any longer, now that she had seen the evidence with her own eyes, and the matter seemed to her even more serious now that his unhappy impulse had carried him away yet farther. But on that very account she once more advised him most urgently to reflect, and to proceed with the utmost caution in the matter of taking counter-measures. However, they were agreed upon one point, and that was that the servants must now be examined, since in the letter received by D'Estange it was especially stated that one of them had been bribed. But although the General subjected them one by one to a severe examination (he was full of resentment at the thought of their treachery), and particularly the ancient Samuel and a still untried lady's-maid, not only did his examination yield absolutely no result, but he actually received the impression that these people really knew nothing whatever about the matter. And however incredible this

might seem—and, as a matter of fact, it seemed impossible—both M. de Morell and the Baroness appeared to be half-inclined to believe the servants; for, if they spoke the truth, the enemy was less inimical, or at least less near at hand and less alarming.

But on Tuesday, towards the evening, the Baron entered the ladies' drawing-room with a fresh letter in his hand, and stood before the Baroness, who, for her part, was irresolutely twisting between her fingers a letter which she herself had just discovered. Involuntarily they both smiled. No explanation was necessary, even for Marie, who just then entered the room; she did not quite open the door, but only so far as was necessary to admit her, and unobtrusively slipped into an armchair.

The Baron read the letter to his wife. The writer, who this time had signed himself E. R., announced that he was perfectly well aware that Mme de Morell hated her daughter; and, in order to please the mother, he was going to slander Marie so persistently that the Baroness would have a pretext for getting rid of her; and she would get rid of her by giving her to him, whereby she would at once show her gratitude to him (for he was helping the she-devil to have her own way) and would at the same time be able to

torment her daughter. . . . The Baron slowly laid the letter down; Marie tried to reach it, but Mme de Morell picked it up again and went on to the end of the letter, which her husband had not read:

It will avenge my sufferings to see that young blossom withering. The young lady shall become a degraded and dishonoured creature, and then, then she can throw herself at the head of the fellow who is only hankering after her money.—E. R.

“He means D’Estance?” she asked.

The General did not reply; he only thrust the letter into his pocket, strode across the room, and returned again. “What does the accursed scoundrel want?” he burst out suddenly, trembling with rage. “In the name of all the saints, what is he aiming at? Well”—and dropping into a chair he drummed angrily on the table—“I’ll soon put a stop to his game.”

After a pause Marie said: “Forgive me, Papa, and you too, Mama, for speaking without being spoken to, and especially just now. But if he hates me so terribly—I mean the man you suspect of having contrived all these horrible things—one must, after all, musn’t one, say what one thinks. What I am thinking all the time is simply this: you feel so cer-

tain because of the handwriting, but, after all, isn't that only conjecture? A handwriting can be imitated, Papa."

"We can see that it isn't that," retorted the Baron, although the soft, even voice seemed to pacify him. "You're a good child, Marie, and you needn't fear that any mistake will be made. Besides, there are experts, if it comes to that. Apparently you wanted the letter to disappear?" He turned to the Baroness, remembering the attitude of perplexity in which he had surprised her.

"I was just going to destroy it," she admitted, disregarding the half-smile with which the question was asked.

"Ah, but you mustn't do that." And he continued: "We must be on our guard in good time; I mean, of course, in case matters should get worse; it does no harm, and it is no trouble; throw the letter away and the man is acquitted. The more ticklish the business of catching him, the greater the temptation to destroy it. We haven't followed our first impulse, and now, involuntarily, it occurs to us that something else definite will have to happen before we can lay hands on the fellow. I admit it goes against the grain. But, after all, you are really quite right, he is only

blustering, and he'll be quiet if we don't react. Let us just lie low and take the wind out of his sails." (As he spoke he was stroking his daughter's hair.) "But the moment he dares to make the least move I'll make an end of him then and there, you may both be sure of that. And then let no one stand in my way."

"How you talk!" said the Baroness. "Who would be so unreasonable as to wish to hinder you from protecting your family in case of need! Besides, if—which God forbid—" and she drew a deep breath, "if he carries out his threat, then my only anxiety, and my only arguments against the steps which you would then be driven to take, would, of course, be meaningless. If that happens I will be silent and leave it to you to take such reprisals as you must. But for the time being you need hardly see him, and certainly not in the house, which is the main thing; after all, we have given our house-warming, and so for a time we are relieved of bringing matters to a climax ourselves, and we can wait."

What Mme de Morell referred to in these words was, considered from another aspect, one of the reasons why La Roncière also, during these two days, had been unable to come to any decision. As a matter

of fact, he was convinced that the Morells would send for him to explain and make amends for an injustice which had been proven as such. But this did not happen; neither did anything else happen; and, strictly speaking, it was not even clear whether the order to leave the house was intended to hold good for one occasion or for all time. The first shower of invitations was over; none were being issued now; and so there could be no sudden omission which would force him to take up a definite position. And what Ambert had suggested for his consideration served, after all, merely to paralyse the desire to take the offensive of which he was conscious from time to time; not out of a prudent regard for his own person, God forbid! but because he disliked the idea of making a scene to-day when to-morrow, perhaps, these people would have come to their senses.

So at least he told himself, and meanwhile he let the days go by.

On the third day, however, which was a Wednesday, D'Estange, encountering him in the street, ostentatiously avoided him and all but cut him dead. Before Emil had time to reflect he was gone; it was too late to ask him to account for his behaviour; moreover, it could hardly be by chance that since the

soirée he had, as a matter of fact, often seen D'Estange in the lecture-theatre, but had never been able to get hold of him. Suddenly he realized this, and there was an end of his passiveness. Here was something that would admit of no delay. His deliberate resolution to do nothing rash now seemed to him a merely nonsensical idea which he had made an excuse for delay, out of laziness, or else out of cowardice. He did not trouble his head about it any longer, but immediately got going. After all, it had been something new for him to play the pacifist. . . . He went to Jacquemin, for he did not care to risk a snub from the General.

In the administrative offices of the school there was at this time of day a bustle of activity, although, as Emil had expected, the commanding officer was not present. But the adjutant was there. Emil was admitted immediately. Jacquemin was alone in his room. He was on his feet behind the writing-table when he saw Emil standing in the doorway, but he did not go forward to meet him, nor did he ask him to sit down.

Emil announced that he wished to ask for certain information. The adjutant bowed formally.

"As adjutant," Emil began, "you are the inter-

cessor between us and the commander. Accordingly, I think I am justified in demanding the said information from you. But, at the same time, I will ask you, as a comrade, to tell me fairly and squarely what I want to know."

Jacquemin made no move to seat himself. He placed one hand on his hip, the other on the table in front of him, straightened himself abruptly and murmured: "Please proceed."

It was only this: why, on Sunday evening—he needn't trouble to go into details—had the General sent him out of the house?

Jacquemin replied in a decided tone: "On account of that ill-bred remark, which I need not further particularize, and on account of the anonymous letters."

"On account of what letters?" cried Emil angrily.

Jacquemin gazed coolly into space. "M. le Lieutenant, I must call your attention to the fact that the comedy which you are preparing to play here, precisely as I expected, is somewhat premature. The General has seen fit to ignore your proceedings, and if I, as you correctly say, speak to you as his representative, I am nevertheless not empowered to encroach upon his rights. If, one of these days, you are

questioned, you can assume what you please. As a comrade, I will add that the intention of his forbearance is simply to grant you a respite in order that you may eventually repent of your behaviour. And that, I think, is all that need be said."

Emil stared at him uncomprehendingly. And suddenly his rage overcame him. "I shall demand not merely justification, but satisfaction!" he cried.

"As you please, that is entirely your affair," and Jacquemin drew up his chair, and waved his hand with a gesture of permission and dismissal; and he turned to his work.

Emil, in disgust, stormed out of the room.

Now for D'Estange; no question about that. After all, it must be possible to get on the track of this affair? D'Estange was not involved personally; moreover, he was no puppet of the General's, like that conceited gargoyle up there, that incarnate "right hand"; D'Estange could not refuse to explain what had made him suddenly turn against him; it was bad enough that he should condemn him so readily; but they were all like that; damn them, why did he trouble about them? . . . Pursued by such thoughts, Emil walked round the school buildings, which formed a huge red block in the middle of the

parade-ground, and entered the officers' club by a door at the back. An orderly informed him that Captain d'Estance was not there. Emil, without a moment's hesitation, turned and went to his lodgings.

The landlady invited him to wait on the landing; the gentleman had just come in; she would ask . . . and she knocked on the door. He heard her announce him in a half-whisper; he heard D'Estance giving her his instructions. Then she returned, embarrassed; M. le Capitaine greatly regretted. . . . For a moment Emil was tempted to thrust her aside and force his way in, but then he pulled himself together, thanked her, and blundered down the stairs, step by step, biting his moustache.

Next, about the time when the afternoon lecture concluded, he patrolled up and down before the gates of the school, barely able to control his wrath and impatience. It was impossible for him to rest, and now he intended, in the presence of all his comrades, and, if necessary, by force, to compel D'Estance to stop and answer his questions. A nice way of behaving! "The gentleman regrets!" He wouldn't get out of it so easily as that. And if he was fighting shy of him for some other reason, quite independent of this affair, and simultaneous with it only

by chance, all the better; but that was extremely improbable. Anyhow, that would be cleared up. And there they were at last, thank God!

Emil posted himself a little to one side, in the sight of all, and watched. But D'Estrange was among the last to appear. It was not clear whether he was alone or engaged in conversation. But his first glance as he left the parade-ground, while he was still in the gateway, warned him of Emil's presence, whose statuesque attitude boded no good, and in any case made him conspicuous. As he saw that he could not evade him he hurried to the back of the courtyard, although this was already almost empty; only a few stragglers were now leaving the building. With giant strides he went back, without regarding La Roncière, who walked silently at his elbow, until they reached the inner wall; then he halted and turned about. It was no longer light. They stood facing one another; for some seconds they were both breathless with restrained anger and the haste they had made.

When they had recovered breath Emil spoke: "I want to know now, D'Estrange, why you have been cutting me for the last two days?"

At this intimate question Octave d'Estrange threw up his head; then, controlling himself, he quickly

retorted: "*Only* cutting you, perhaps you intend to ask me? At all events, a question which you might well ask. And if that were not so, you may be assured that I should not speak with you. But my hands have been tied; what's more, I consider that they are still tied! Do you understand? This state of affairs cannot last much longer, and, believe me, such half-measures are abhorrent to me. So much so that I wanted to make an end of them, though perhaps without properly looking into the matter. Kindly take note of that. You pursue me, and I tell you this, so that *you*, after all, shall not think . . ."

Emil disregarded the contempt expressed in this last sentence. He interrupted the captain. "You spit and mew, D'Estange, but that's no good to me, and I am not to be got rid of. I insist on being told the reason why you suddenly begin to avoid me."

"You dare, Monsieur, to tell me to my face——"

Emil controlled himself with an effort. Then he asked: "Is it on account of the letters?" And as he saw the effect of this cue, he burst out: "Your smiling means nothing to me! What do I care for your superior smile? I have betrayed myself, eh? But I have already seen Jacquemin to-day; he began to talk some nonsense about letters. I know nothing but

the word—the word, and not what lies behind it.”

D’Estance thrust his head forward, protruding his lips. “You have the audacity . . . I don’t want to lose my temper. You are trying to throw dust in my eyes! Eh?”

“Dust in your eyes! I want to know what is going on! Are you really deaf and blind, D’Estance? You must, after all, have some knowledge of it! How am I going to defend myself—and you know me; I don’t find it easy to say such a thing—if everyone thinks I am insulting him with a lie the moment I declare that I know nothing?”

“In short, you deny that you have written me letters?”

“*What* letters, I ask for for the hundredth time?”

“Letters in your hand to me. And not only to me.”

Emil took a step backwards. “In my hand? And that they are forged, that at least they might be forged—that absolutely never occurs to you, D’Estance? What is easier than to forge a handwriting if one sets oneself to do it——”

“Very possibly,” said D’Estance, looking at Emil steadily. “I have no experience, M. le Lieutenant.”

His words had an icy coldness; they cut like a knife. For a moment they staggered Emil, and he

trembled. He said with difficulty: "Well, but if it is my own handwriting—I have surely no need to forge it. . . ."

D'Estance made a violent gesture of repudiation. "May be! I have no desire to go into that. But, after all, it is impossible to see who could have any interest in forging your handwriting."

"*I* have no desire to go into that," replied Emil. He had his wits about him once more. "Leave that to me. But now that we are halfway to understanding one another, I must ask you one more question, D'Estance: how could you condemn me on the instant and without reflection, on mere appearances, on a sort of hearsay, for it really is nothing better? That I simply don't understand."

Captain d'Estance replied, soberly enough, but with an occasional note of anger and reproof: "And I don't understand your question. Even if you, with your past, had the same claim as another: I am doing what is due to myself. Where there is anything questionable I protect myself. Can one have two opinions as to taking such a course? Among men of my standing, I really think not. Or are you, perhaps, such an intimate friend that I ought to identify myself with you, for better or worse, in fortune or dis-

grace? No; each of us knows of himself what he knows, and you may know the best of yourself. But does that alter the case for me? If you are able to clear yourself all will be as it was—I should have no cause to reproach myself. You see that I am not losing my temper. I stand by the appearances. It is the most elementary lesson of life, that a man is what he is only for himself; a man with whom we have intercourse must be for us what he appears.”

“Much good may the lesson do you, D’Estance!” said Emil with bitter calm.

“Will you kindly not become aggressive again!” And like a man who would have done better to keep silence, D’Estance began to withdraw. “And I beg you,” he said in conclusion, “not to address me by name if we should meet anywhere. Rather than interrupt you every time I have suffered it now, but in future, as I have said, I request you to refrain from doing so. And now, since there is really no more to be said, we will for the present go each our own way. I should be very pleased if . . . Good evening.”

And without waiting for his salute to be returned, he stalked across the courtyard, leaving Emil where he stood, brooding, in the increasing darkness.

The attitude of the captain during this conversation had been influenced more than he himself could have realized by a fresh piece of documentary evidence which had reached him that morning, and was worded as follows:

You have done me a real service in telling the General everything. Marie will now be all the more distressed. I have procured a few lines in her handwriting and am now taking pains to imitate them; if I succeed you may see the result. I am sharpening my pen in order to say some pretty things to you in the name of the poor disconsolate creature. . . .

And a note was actually included; it was apparently addressed to D'Estance, and was worded thus:

You are hard as a rock, and I am so gentle and tender; I love you, for you are worthy of love. . . .

Octave d'Estance was quite familiar with Marie's handwriting, which was here imitated so deceptively that he might well believe, however often he read the lines, that they really came from her, and that she had seriously addressed him in such terms. The idea, however, was not displeasing to him; indeed, before he realized what he was doing he had refrained from reporting the receipt of the letter, and

he could hardly have told himself why. He was only very dimly conscious, moreover, of the origin of a childish, though ever so fugitive, tolerance of La Roncière's defence. What with one thing and another, he was far from comfortable; for the first time it was not clear as daylight how he ought to behave. Both this tolerance and his procrastination were inadmissible, or at least impolitic; his strictness, on which he had always relied, could not see a clear path; and this odious sham, this letter from an unreal Marie, had made things even more disagreeable. Lastly, out of consideration for the Morells, before he quite knew what he was doing, he had committed a blunder and prejudiced his standing in the regiment. But what was to be done now as regards the letter? He hesitated. Next day he was still hesitating. M. de Morell's favour was of value to him only if a result were achieved which would have the effect of placing him, Octave d'Estange, in a position to dispense with the favour of all other persons. At all events, he still retained the letter. He tried in vain to reason with himself; his fondness and his egoism seemed to obstruct one another. But it was the black and white that bewitched him. He had never had any imagination; but it visited him now.

THURSDAY arrived, and that evening there was a small sensation to look forward to—the opening performance of the theatre. It was September 9th. La Roncière decided at the last moment to go; it was important that he should not give the impression that he was creeping out of sight. He had once more

spoken to Jacquemin, and had requested that the incriminating letters should be handed over to him; he, for his part, insisted on an inquiry, and wished to forward them to the public prosecutor. Utterly unprepared for this, Jacquemin did not immediately refuse to produce them on the grounds that Emil would be able to destroy the proofs of his guilt, but promised to notify him further as soon as he had submitted his proposal. The General and his wife went to the theatre as a matter of course. As a matter of course, too, Marie was left at home; however, she had a friend with her, Mignon Guichet, the daughter of the local doctor, with whom she passed the time in the company of Miss Allen.

Towards midnight Dr. Guichet was returning from a late visit to one of his patients. His way led him past the Morells' house, and as he came out on to the quay he noted a certain disturbance there: men's voices and a stir of people; and he saw, slinking towards him over the bridge, certain figures, as it seemed to him, of questionable women. Dr. Guichet pulled his pointed beard under his chin with his crooked forefinger and peered ahead. But it was only in the dark that he saw matters thus; when he drew nearer he realized what was happening. The carriage-

gate of the courtyard was being opened; old Samuel was opening it and was chatting to Dr. Guichet's servant, who had just come to escort "his mademoiselle" home; Mignon had already been told of his arrival. Now Morell's *calèche* rolled out of the gate. Upstairs a window was thrown up, and Marie greeted her friend's father. Mignon, she said, would be ready directly. Guichet sent his servant home. Samuel swung himself up behind the coachman, and the horses trotted off. Guichet, looking up, said that he supposed that Marie's parents were at the theatre. Yes, she replied; they didn't usually keep the carriage waiting when the distance from home was so short. "Ah, Papa!" said Mignon gladly, coming out into the street; and she took his arm. There was an interchange of greetings; then Marie closed the window and looked round at Miss Allen, who was already preparing for bed. Miss Allen's bedroom opened out of Marie's sitting-room; the girl's bedroom was beyond that of her governess—an arrangement of Mme de Morell's; consequently Marie's bedroom could only be entered by way of Miss Allen's. Both were soon in bed; they were not sitting up for Monsieur and Madame, and it seemed as though the night would be as all other nights.

But in the morning it was learned that it was not so.

Shortly before nine, when the husband and wife had completed their toilet and were about to go down to breakfast, Miss Allen was heard to give a cry of distress; next moment she was knocking at the door, and as the Baroness opened it she staggered past her into the room. Her hair hung in grey and yellow streaks round her face, which looked like a face of cracked porcelain; and her lamentations in broken French were not at first intelligible. Turning to the Baron and the Baroness alternately, she was trying, it seemed, to explain why she was still in her dressing-gown. But it was not very long before she became more collected, since she had merely lost her head anew when confronted by the necessary task of reporting what had occurred; before this she had had time to compose herself more or less, for the terrible thing had occurred some hours previously.

An outrage! An abomination! A man had forced his way into Marie's room, through the window, and with a cloth—yes, he had worn a black cloth over his face—, but with a white cloth he had tried to strangle Marie, and had bound her with a long cord, and had then torn off her nightdress, which was nowhere to be found; and he had then assaulted her

out of revenge, after locking the door, which Miss Allen had to break in. She had just heard all this from Marie, for she herself had heard nothing of the whole affair until the shriek which Marie gave when she recovered from her swoon, because he stabbed her with the knife as well. . . .

The reassurance that Marie was all right now Miss Allen had to shout after the parents. They had listened to her, so far, as to a person who apparently is not quite right in her head, paying more attention to the speaker than to the words. But on the mention of the knife they rushed out of the room, the General running downstairs to send for Guichet, whom he preferred to the military surgeon, and the Baroness to Marie's bedroom.

Marie was standing at the window; she was turning away from it as her mother entered. She was scantily clad; her eyes were glaring and her lips quivering.

"What is it?" asked the Baroness.

"He went by, La Roncière; it was he." And Marie turned her face away, struggling with her tears.

"Who—what was he doing?"

"In the night; like he was in the night." The thought made her tremble.

The Baroness flushed darkly. "It was *he*? You know that?"

Her daughter could only nod. But she pointed with her left hand to a letter which lay on the floor. It now occurred to her mother that she was concealing her right hand. She seized Marie's arm; the girl yielded it limply; and she saw on the wrist the marks of a bite. The General, who had entered the room, saw Marie pointing at the letter; he picked it up and read it. It was addressed to the Baroness:

You alone will understand me, you, whom your daughter unfortunately does not resemble. It is a great crime to besmirch the queen. Yet how I have loved Marie; yes, idolized her! She has scourged me with contempt. I begged her once to go out; on that day she kept her room. I mean to give her the right to hate me. That wretch (D'Estange) had the impudence to tell M. de Morell everything. I have written to him that wherever I found him I would stamp the seal of disgrace on his face. I await him on the place of combat. Then I shall triumph over him. It will be a joy to me to gloat over the misery of the proud lady who mercilessly lets my heart consume itself.
—E. R.

The reader's face grew ominously tense. But when he had finished reading the letter he carefully put

it in his pocket. "If you can, my child, you must tell me now exactly what happened," he said.

Marie smiled bravely; she looked exhausted. "I shall soon feel better, Papa," she replied, moving towards her bed; but she stumbled as she went, and her father had to support her. She leaned back upon the rumpled pillows, on which spots of blood were visible, closed her eyes for a time, while all was silent, and then, almost in a whisper, she began her tale.

She was awakened by the breaking of a window-pane. A hand was thrust in, which turned the catch of the window. She could see quite well, it was bright moonlight. He jumped into the room; he was wearing an overcoat and a cap with an edging of silver; his sabre, too. And a black silken bandage under his chin and tied behind his ears. When he said: "I have come to revenge myself!" she plainly recognized his voice; it was La Roncière's; he did not even disguise it. He locked the door of Miss Allen's room. Then he threw Marie across the bed, after throwing away the chair behind which she had taken refuge on springing to her feet. He took a cloth from the chest of drawers and wound it round her throat so tightly that she was almost strangled; she wanted to cry out but

could not. He dragged off her nightdress and tied her up with a cord; then he began to illtreat her, cursing D'Estance all the time. He bit her and scratched her, and struck her on the breast with his fist, and kicked her. She fainted, and it was only when she came to herself and screamed that Miss Allen heard her and rattled the door. La Roncière released her immediately, threw down a letter, climbed out of the windows and disappeared.

Miss Allen stated that when she at last succeeded in opening the door she found Marie in the condition described; the cloth round her throat had apparently become loosened; her whole body, which was uncovered, her nightdress having been removed, was bound with a long cord; and she was seized with another fainting-fit. She revived the child as well as she could, and she had, as a matter of fact, quickly recovered. She assured the girl's parents over and over again that Marie had urgently begged her not to wake them. Marie herself confirmed this in order to shield her from blame.

The Baroness stood with folded arms. No one spoke. The General moved to and fro, examining the room. He found everything as Marie had stated, and before her, Miss Allen. In the window-pane was a

hole large enough to admit a man's arm; the lock of the door was broken; there was the cord, the white cloth, and the letter; the nightdress was nowhere in the room; the overturned chair still lay on the floor. M. de Morell congratulated Miss Allen somewhat irritably on the soundness of her slumbers, which were not disturbed by the clatter of a chair flung across the room; the girl had to scream first. He was doing his best to control himself.

"What was this about a stab?" he inquired. "You told us. . . . Don't keep anything back, my child," he admonished Marie. But Marie only looked away, violently shook her head, and pressed her knees together.

"Wouldn't you like to take anything, Marie?" asked the Baroness, who was still standing motionless.

She would drink a cup of milk later. . . . But Miss Allen was already hurrying off to fetch it.

"I wonder where Guichet is detained," said the Baroness in a husky voice.

And at this moment Miss Allen brought the doctor into the room; she herself went out again. The astonished man was briefly informed of what had happened; while Marie drank the milk which had been

brought her, in audible gulps, her father talked to him quietly by the window; he was then left alone with the patient.

The examination lasted only a few minutes. It was conducted with sedulous propriety. In the adjoining room he learned from Miss Allen, whom he sent back to Marie's room, that Monsieur and Madame were awaiting him at breakfast. He found them before an almost untouched table, mechanically taking a few mouthfuls. He swallowed a small glass of cognac, which the General immediately set before him, and proceeded to enlarge in detail upon the discovery—thank God, not particularly serious—which he had announced in two words as he entered the door.

The knife-wound in question had proved to be a stab, or rather a cut, made with some sharp instrument, about the length of one's thumb, on the inner side of the upper part of the thigh. There was no reason for apprehensions of a delicate nature, so far as he could judge from superficial appearances; it did not seem advisable to-day to press the young lady too closely; moreover, in this connection he did not care to anticipate his instructions, but would wish to be expressly authorized. In other respects the trou-

ble was confined to a number of scratches, cuticular abrasions and weals, and also the bite on the wrist, to which, as to the stab, he had applied a bandage. And so far as the patient felt able, he was of opinion that she should not spend the day in bed, but should, as usual, come downstairs, though without exerting herself; thus the depressing effect upon her spirits, which was, unfortunately, already apparent, would be more promptly dispelled.

On this occasion Dr. Guichet confined himself to strictly professional observations. He did not linger, but proposed to pay a second visit in the evening, and took his leave.

Between the husband and wife, however, there was an excited altercation. Once he was reassured as to Marie's condition the General had no other thought than to lay the culprit by the heels; and he was tormented by the idea that he might escape. Mme de Morell, on the other hand, implored him to keep the matter of the assault secret; what would be gained by punishing the culprit if the public was thereby informed of the affair, and Marie's reputation was irretrievably besmirched? But all her powers of persuasion were hardly sufficient to bring her husband to his senses; he was blind with fury; he was only wait-

ing for Jacquemin in order to give him the necessary authorization. And Jacquemin must be there at any moment, for in the meanwhile it had struck ten. And he did arrive, but with an announcement that threw a new light on the whole affair.

The Baroness was again with Marie, and the General had gone to his office. Jacquemin entered without ceremony; he was speaking even as he passed through the doorway.

"I met Dr. Guichet not far from here; if he was coming from here, M. le Baron, may I ask you—"

"Later on, later on——"

"—whether you know already *why* the staff surgeon had already gone out?"

"What? I didn't send for Guichet in default of the staff surgeon."

"Well, you couldn't have got him. He was on the field of combat."

"What's that, Jacquemin?"

"A duel, M. le Baron; a duel has been fought between D'Estange and La Roncière."

These words were heard by Mme de Morell also, who at this moment made an unwonted entrance; she was not needed in Marie's room, and her fears had brought her back to her husband; she intended, at any

cost, to prevent Morell from taking any indiscreet action, and she was quick to seize any advantage which might offer itself.

“Did you hear that?” cried the General.

“A duel. I heard. Tell us, then. Please don’t let me interrupt you.”

And Jacquemin, whose manner was already sufficiently portentous, begged permission to report the matter in due sequence, and therewith, drawing a letter from his pocket, he began by reading it:

You are a miserable fellow, a wretched coward. Any other man would have demanded satisfaction after the letters I have written you. Instead of this you have denounced me to the General. You are a poltroon. I shall stamp the seal of disgrace on your face on the first opportunity. Then we shall see what you will do.—Emil de la Ron. . . .

This document had reached D’Estance by the early post. He hurried with it to Jacquemin, said something about discretion which he could no longer observe, and begged the adjutant to act as his second. Jacquemin, as a matter of course, placed himself at his disposal, and conveyed the challenge. La Roncière accepted it without hesitation, but had the impudence

to declare that he knew nothing whatever of any letters. He chose Ambert to act as his second, and Ambert undertook to notify the surgeon. The duel was fought an hour later; the meeting took place on a patch of turf sheltered by osiers, a little way upstream. It was a furious combat; both of the adversaries meant business. D'Estange behaved admirably. He was still on his feet after three wounds in the chest, and after he received the fourth he wounded La Roncière in the shoulder. Then La Roncière's sword was shattered; little Ambert, his voice cracking, shrieked. "You see, he's disarmed" and snatched with his bare hand at D'Estange's blade. But at this moment D'Estange collapsed. He had to be carried off the field. His wounds were not mortal. La Roncière needed no assistance once he had been bandaged a little. . . . This, concluded Jacquemin, was what had occurred; and he dabbed his forehead with his spotlessly white handkerchief.

The General understood from this report that La Roncière could not now escape. That was the principal thing. Even if the wound was not serious, it would presumably make it impossible for him to travel that day. Jacquemin was of the same opinion. He added that La Roncière's request for the sur-

render of the letters, in respect of which M. de Morell had not as yet cared to give a final decision, had now presumably become untenable. "Of course it has!" cried the General; and he enlightened his devoted adjutant as to the events of the night. Jacquemin's indignation left nothing to be desired. Captain d'Estange, he said, when already lying on the stretcher, had demanded a confession from La Roncière, and in return had offered reconciliation; but the despicable fellow was obdurate.

"That won't help him much longer now," interposed the Baroness, who saw an opportunity of giving the affair a favourable turn. And finally even the Baron approved of the proposal which she now unfolded. Jacquemin was to go to La Roncière, and in the name of D'Estange—whose consent must be presumed, in case he was unconscious—he was to demand a written statement that La Roncière had written the letters; and really only the letter to D'Estange, for the one admission, of course, implied the others. He was to appeal to the man's conscience, and then, if that was unavailing, he was to threaten him with immediate denunciation, which they were firmly resolved should follow if the statement was refused; and he was to make him realize thoroughly what he

would then have to expect. Apart from this, he must go on leave and quit the town as soon as possible. "When we have once got him away we will consider quietly what else is to be done," said Mme de Morrell.

Jacquemin ventured to express his silent approval. The Baron gave proof of submission to his wife's proposal by writing a permit of leave and a pass to Paris, which he handed to Jacquemin. He was anxious to lose no time, and while he intimated to the Baroness that he was as sensible as she was of what was at stake, and would apply all the diplomacy of which he was capable in his efforts to be of service to her, and bowed to the General, who advised him, in any case, as a matter of form, to inquire after D'Estange, he made ready to depart, and left the house bursting with the consciousness of his mission.

At D'Estange's lodgings, in the corridor, the surgeon impressed upon him that he must "cut it short." The patient had been put to bed; his eyes were dim and unmoving; he listened and assented to everything; he could hardly speak. But when Jacquemin asked him for the rest of the letters, which he thought it well to have by him, he pointed towards the outer room. Jacquemin pressed his hand, went out on tip-

toe, and found the other letters in D'Estange's desk. With them he proceeded on his way.

La Roncière was sitting by the window in an easy-chair; his shirt was open, exposing his bandages. Annette, the younger sister of his landlady, was looking after him; she was kneeling in front of him and wrapping his feet in a plaid. She rose as Jacquemin's solemn face appeared in the doorway. He said, in carefully modulated tone: "I beg you not to incommode yourself." Annette slipped out of the room. La Roncière, without rising, silently pointed to a chair. Jacquemin ignored the gesture.

"In consideration of your enfeebled condition," he said, "I hope I shall not have to trouble you for long. That, however, depends on you. May I advise you to take advantage of your present composure in order to recognize the irrevocable and not to resist it; so keep your wits about you, and don't end by saying something from which a man of your character will find it difficult to withdraw; a lie, or——"

"I am greatly obliged. And now, if you don't mind, come to the point!"

"I consider that I was obliged. . . . Then to come to the point: I am here in the name of Captain d'Estange, and I beg to renew his request; that is,

I have to make you the following offer, and at the same time to observe that this is his last word: all shall be forgotten and forgiven if, in the first place, you confess to the authorship of those letters, and, in the second place, leave the town directly you have recovered; I have your permit of leave on me, from which you may conclude that what D'Estance says to you he says in agreement with a higher authority. If, however, you persist in your senseless attitude of knowing nothing about the affair, criminal proceedings will be taken instantly. What that would mean I need hardly tell you. You wouldn't get off with less than five years; and think of the professional consequences; don't ruin your life—out of obstinacy. Or what is one to call it? Don't be so insanely stubborn. It is done! We don't want to know why. All that D'Estance asks for is the certainty that it's over and will not happen again. Naturally enough you must clear out! As for the objection that he might perhaps not keep his word: you have, of course, lost, by your folly, the right to make any such objection. Moreover, you may be assured that he has no need of your confession in order to send you straight to prison. The experts would find no difficulty whatever in proving your identity in court—I mean, the identity of the

handwriting; and that would convict you. Besides, the last letter is signed with almost your full name."

"Should I really have been so stupid," said Emil, like a man who speaks for the sake of speaking, "to have signed my name to the letters if I had really written them?"

Jacquemin merely waved his hand in a gesture of disparagement.

"We can credit you with sufficient circumspection," he retorted in a superior tone, "to have signed the letters deliberately, precisely because that is a plausible argument." It did not escape him that Emil's features suddenly quivered. He continued, with increased urgency: "And now, let's have no more of this useless obstinacy; the handwriting is not even disguised in a single instance!" he added suggestively.

His zeal elicited a smile from Emil. "Is that so?" he asked.

Jacquemin saw his triumph jeopardized; he stamped on the floor and shouted angrily: "Spare me that sort of thing! And don't try your buffoonery on me. . . ."

He sought for a more direct and stronger phrase, but Emil said in a weary tone:

"I have allowed you to have your say, because all

this chatter is important to me, and I was hoping to hear something new. In that respect, at all events, you have disappointed me. But in any case it is now high time that I should have sight of these letters. It doesn't seem to me that that's asking too much. And you must surely have them with you these singular letters, these self-betraying letters, so cleverly undisguised. . . ." He grasped his wounded shoulder.

Jacquemin, at a loss for effective words, brought out the letters, threw them into La Roncière's lap, and, anxious above all to make it clear to him that if he complied it was only as an observer of human nature, he even moved over to the farther window and gazed into the street, waiting.

He heard the quick rustling as Emil turned over page after page. And then he heard nothing more; Emil's hands were still.

A black cloud danced before his eyes; then it seemed as though night fell from the skies, like a fluttering cloth torn from the dome of heaven, and behind it was an aching sea of light that floated and whirled before him. Jacquemin heard a groan; but he thought it wise not to look round yet; so he took out his notebook and wrote something across a blank page.

Emil had thrown back his head; the bloodless lips were visible under his moustache; he pressed Marie's letter to his damp forehead; his face was grey, and he was breathing in heavy gasps.

"I wrote that, but not myself," he murmured.

"What?" Jacquemin turned as Emil paused.

Emil's courage was reviving. His fingers moved fumblingly over the letters; his veiled glance wandered over Jacquemin's figure.

"I can't believe——" began Jacquemin.

And Emil, in a tone that was almost indulgent, interrupted him, and shaking his head: "My dear fellow, no, of course you can't believe it! No, of course you can't!" And he continued to shake his head.

Jacquemin made a decided move. "You need only write your name." He held out his open notebook.

Emil looked at him at first as though he did not understand him, but his expression of anxious dread was replaced by a look of something almost like cunning, and he continued to look at him, while he wrote, with a lifeless, amiable smile.

Jacquemin closed his notebook with a snap, put it away, laid the permit of leave on the table, and began to stack the letters together. "Leave them here; leave this at least," begged Emil, and he picked up

the letter which contained Marie's note. Jacquemin complied and hurried from the room.

He had offered Emil his hand, but Emil's hand fell away from his, and now it was waving to and fro Marie's little note. "No, go," he said to Annette, who entered the room; "alone—must be alone; don't bother——" and he nodded apathetically and continued to play with the note, which he held between his lips whenever he grasped his wounded shoulder.

Jacquemin, meanwhile, took his time. He savoured the sense of victory to the full; he reflected that so far he had had scarcely anything to eat, and proceeded to make up for it. Then he realized that he was tired, and lay down to rest. It was consequently almost four o'clock when he appeared before the General, where he found that he had been anxiously awaited. He made no reply to the questions that were showered upon him; he simply asked for a knife, and with this he ceremoniously removed a leaf from his notebook, which he handed to the Baroness. She thanked him, and so did the General. The confession merely stated that the undersigned acknowledge that he was guilty of writing "anonymous letters." As a matter of fact, three fresh letters had been received, but the General thought they might all be lumped to-

gether; they were probably dispatched before the deed. They contained some hazardous suggestions; but the General and his wife surrendered themselves, almost with violence, to the relief that Jacquemin had brought them, and the General even compelled himself calmly to read them once more after Jacquemin had gone.

There was a letter to himself:

You might have arranged matters with me. You have influence with your daughter; I counted on your understanding as a man. You have no understanding for anything but your honour. I longed to trample it utterly in the dust. Marie's shame will soon be the talk of Paris.

There was a letter to Marie:

Now you are the most pitiful of creatures. He whom you chose to be your knight is laid low by my hand. And what a monstrous bond unites us! In a few months you will be imploring me to give you and another being my name.

And there was one to Marie's mother:

I have done nothing than treacherously abuse her. I wished only to make her an object of suspicion, and thereby force you to offer me her hand. She will refuse, being in love with a base fellow who would take her at any

time out of avarice. I shall know how to balk him; I have dreamt that still more blood must flow.

M. de Morell threw the letters aside. "Childish, contradictory twaddle," he growled; "the man gets drunk on his own ranting."

The Baroness, with her arms under her shawl, went quietly and thoughtfully across the room. "One would hardly think it possible," she said, nodding.

"Have you spoken to Marie?" he asked.

"There was nothing to be got out of her; we shall have to wait a little longer. That is all we can do now—wait. Perhaps he has really satisfied his imagination with these phrases."

A delusive hope, as it seemed. On the following morning Marie lay unconscious on the floor beside her bed. It was a long time before she came to herself. "He is going to kill my father, my mother!" she said, and collapsed again. They discovered a note in her convulsively closed hand. She had found it on waking, she stammered. The Baroness smoothed it out and read:

Those you love best on earth—D'Estange, your father, your mother—have only a few days to live. You have disdained me. My revenge will find you.

They found it impossible to bring her completely to her senses; she seemed to be in a state of deathly exhaustion. She begged them all to lock the doors, to lock the house up. She was on the verge of a nervous crisis.

And now the idea of hushing the matter up was abandoned. Even the Baroness raised no further objection. They had reason to anticipate an act of violence which could only be averted by force. In a moment the General was ready to go out. He went himself in order to prevent further mischief. He took the note with him in his glove.

Ambert, however, who about this very time rushed into Emil's bedroom, knew nothing as yet of this note; he was referring to the letters of the day before, of which he had just heard, when he cried in desperation: "What does this mean? I implore you, La Roncière; more letters have been received. There's no end to this. You must make a move. Do at least say something! What can it mean? We can't be lost yet. We can't look on at this, La Roncière; or else come to your senses!"

He had heard also of La Roncière's admission, and all this was too much for the little man.

Emil was sitting on the edge of his bed, in his

shirt, with rumpled hair; he had had a sleepless night and was feverish. Uncertainly he took a few steps, until he stood in the middle of the room; he gazed at Ambert with glassy eyes, stretched himself, shrugging his shoulders, and began to swing his arms, and to speak, with a stumbling tongue, louder and louder, and more and more confusedly:

“What am I doing? It is rushing past me. Farther and farther, and I can’t stop it! On and on, and I’m in it, stuck fast in myself, and I can only be myself, and no one else. And I must command the strange mind. I must do penance because it lets it rush on; on and on; I am to command what it allows to go on! And don’t command it—to stop—to stop?”

He staggered. Ambert, one of whose hands had been in bandages since the duel, was hardly able to support him. He sank back on to the pillows, and with the persistence of failing reason he repeated thickly:

“Stop, Marie, stop, Marie! Fate, give over!”

The domiciliary search which was made immediately afterwards did not result in the discovery of Marie’s nightdress.

An hour later, when La Roncière came to himself, he was arrested.

MARIE spent the day in bed. She would not be left alone, but she paid no attention to anything that was said to her, and she herself did not speak; she only listened. She was completely absorbed in listening, hour after hour, and at every perceptible sound she implored, with the same quick gesture of fear, that

the door might be locked; then she lay still again, like a thing broken, her face expressing nothing but the utmost exhaustion; only her lips were compressed, and from time to time she drew a convulsive breath, as though she had forgotten to breathe.

It was already afternoon when footsteps approached, and the jingle of spurs, and she started up—in fear, not in joyful surprise. Her mother gazed at her searchingly; why is she afraid? she seemed to ask. But the time was too short for any revelation; with outstretched arms Marie turned towards the door.

“My darling!” said M. de Morell, hastily embracing her. “It is I, safe and sound.” They clung together for a moment. “You needn’t torment yourself any longer now, child, the scoundrel is in custody, do you understand?”

She shrank back, with open mouth, as though she had seen something terrible. “In prison?” she asked, choking; her eyelids flickered. M. de Morell nodded contentedly. She flung herself over on her bed and lay motionless with her face to the wall.

The General waited for a moment; he then made a sign to the Baroness, and they both left the room.

Marie allowed them to go, although Miss Allen was not present.

Downstairs the General smiled. "How glad she was when I came in," he said. "I believe she really thought he might murder me in the street."

The Baroness gazed at him attentively. She suddenly went up to him and, passing her hands downwards over his arms, she offered him her forehead to be kissed.

"She will soon be quieter now," he said.

And the listening and watching had really ceased, though Marie was still evidently wrestling in silence with her secret thoughts, and was indeed so absorbed in them that no words of those about her seemed to reach her, and when food was brought she refused it without looking at it; but what could be more natural? She would sleep, and to-morrow the world would have returned to its old orbit.

Yet in the morning, when Dr. Guichet came to Marie's bedside, as he did every morning now, and she turned her face towards the room (as though for the first time since she had turned it away from her father the day before) the old man drew his beard under his chin so firmly that it pulled his mouth open.

"She has grown worse in the night," he murmured.

Marie heard it as from a distance, but she did not believe it. She was lost in a dark feeling of unhappiness, of unhappiness so deep and so poignant that as yet she was conscious of nothing else, not even of herself; there were things more portentous, which she would be glad to leave behind; but an illness for Dr. Guichet . . . and *this* night?

How had it been possible? Past Miss Allen and out of the house. How had she done it? Hour followed hour too swiftly; there was no time for considering; Marie ran out of the house, her heart pounding in her ears.

The streets had become very stony, crooked and stony; she stumbled on to her destination, to the door of the prison, and groped for support. In her exhaustion she seemed to escape from herself a little; she stood there on one foot, and as she raised her hand, about to knock, she saw a face that appeared close by, in the farther half of the door, where a little window had flown open; a silent face that looked like a fungus.

"La Roncière," said Marie, rocking her head to and fro: "take me to him, I beg you most urgently."

"Be off with you!" croaked the face.

"I want to see the judge, do just let me in!" she said thickly. The window shut to. Then an agony of rage overcame her. "You shall, but you shall!" she wailed, and beat upon the door with her fists. "I will, I belong to him!" Behind the door a voice was heard asking a question. "One of his women!" croaked the face, and it came through the doorway to drive Marie away.

"So you are still at it!" threatened the warder. He was a monstrously big man; she could see no mouth; but the fungus face trembled, half in sleep and half in anger. She gave way step by step. "I insist on going in, I must go in, I belong in there!" she cried shrilly, lifting her clenched hands above her head. The door fell to again, the monstrous face was gone, but she still heard its dull, croaking voice. "There behind me!" it croaked, and Marie, no longer mistress of her thoughts, turned round, but there was no one behind her. No longer knowing what she did, she suddenly hastened away.

Only when she had reached the quay did she moderate her pace. The heat within her forced its way out; she walked on as though in a cloud. There was her house, and from it a figure was coming towards her. But she wanted to cross the bridge and make the most

of the night into which she had ventured; there was still something to be done. . . . It was a man, a gentleman; but she must go in, and she could not creep away. With mincing steps, blindly, with her blood humming in her ears, she met him, and he passed her without heeding her. She stopped; she dropped her key into her pocket; she already had turned her back on the house; she leaped across the road to the bridge; she ran across it, panting, and on and on. She was conscious of a dragging fatigue; she had, as it were, to carry herself; but irresistibly a fragment of her dream became reality; she was already aware of the little house, wedged in between two others, even before it came in sight; the little house of the sisters Rouault, past which the unsuspecting Miss Allen had often allowed herself to be led; and then she saw that there was a light in one of the ground-floor windows; and then she was there, knocking at the door.

The servant opened the door, cautiously at first, and then flung it wide, less in invitation than in order to come out, now that she had seen a girl who apparently could hardly keep her feet; but Marie took one lurching step forward, and at the same moment the question escaped her lips:

"Is everybody out?"

"Annette isn't," grumbled the old woman. She was not ill-tempered; it was only that she had a grudge against the whole world, because she had lived to see the police force their way into the house; now nothing would surprise her.

But Annette also, who had appeared in the doorway of the lighted room, Annette, with her silence, behaved like a person to whom all things were indifferent. Marie made a movement towards her as though to grasp the hem of her skirt. Annette drew back, and so they passed into the room, and the servant closed the door from outside. Annette stood straight as a dart against the door, her hands behind her; very tall and slender. Marie stood by the table, which she had reached on her impetuous entry; and distractedly she gazed at the objects that lay strewn all over it—articles of uniform, linen, and books—and at a half-filled trunk on the floor; and then again at Annette, who wore a dress of her own making and looked worn out. She had a milk-white skin and scarlet lips, and a smooth, bright forehead.

"What does Mademoiselle want?" she asked at length.

"You are alone?" whispered Marie.

"Yes. Élise has gone out gossiping."

Marie did not know who Élise might be, but the venomous tone in which the words were spoken made her feel at home. "Come closer," she said, and with drooping head she went up to Annette and led her forwards. "You know who I am, I suppose?" she asked as she did so.

Annette assented; everyone knew the General's daughter by sight; she had recognized her at once.

"Your name is Annette? . . . Oh, may I sit down? I must——" Marie said suddenly, and she reeled. Annette pushed forward the nearest chair, but before she could seat herself on the edge of another chair facing the girl Marie sat down, with a glance that asked Annette's permission, and clasped her hands in thankfulness.

"Make it easy for me," she said plaintively.

"What is it you want, then?" repeated Annette, with a trace of boredom in her tone.

Marie, half choking, brought it out by fits and starts: "I have only . . . really, I have only wanted to find someone . . . who knows him . . . for anyone who knows him must surely be on his side. Forgive me, please! You are so young, and I am a hundred years old since yesterday. . . . You look so

young; and now I've found you here . . . and you, I can see, are packing his things for him. . . . You love him, don't you?—I beg your pardon."

"That concerns no one," replied Annette.

But Marie's eyes had already filled with tears; she slipped from her chair and knelt before Annette, and hid her face in the other's lap. "Don't talk like that, don't; be friends!" she begged. Annette, leaning back, sat motionless. She tried to lift Marie's head, to push it away; but Marie resisted.

"I was at the prison," she sobbed.

"You were with him?" Annette's hand lingered on Marie's hair.

"They wouldn't let me in to him."

"Nor me. But perhaps to-morrow, when I take his things. . . ." She gazed in front of her, and the tears slowly fell from her lashes. Marie drew down Annette's hand and stroked it; a thin hand.

"What am I to say to him? Tell me quickly. Oh, my God, now. . . ." said Annette; her lips were writhen. Marie could not see them, and it seemed that she did not hear. She pressed Annette's hand to her cheek. "How sweet you are," she whispered. "I understand everything. He is taken from both of us, but you have been sensible, and you were fortunate."

"What are you saying?" protested Annette weakly. But she said no more, for Marie had already drawn back abashed.

"Don't be hard," whispered Marie. "I am guilty; I had no experience; I was always in the convent . . . not like you. But I can't explain it at home, and so I beg you, I implore you, do please say in court——"

"You needn't be afraid," interrupted Annette quickly, "that is, if you are sure that you won't be called—I shall certainly say nothing. Why drag yet another one into it who can't be of any assistance . . . why, good heavens! . . . Besides, I know of nothing," she added, and then, wishing to seem friendly: "I hadn't the least idea, remember, that you . . . in any way . . . too. . . ."

But the embarrassing words were not spoken, for Marie sprang to her feet, embraced Annette, and stifled her with kisses; she kissed her throat, and noted that the girl smelt of nothing but extreme cleanliness; then she kissed her eyes. "You know little of me!" she cried. "But he has told you about me, hasn't he? You misunderstand me; I was cruel, yes; but tell him that I repent, and that I stand before the world, guiltless and guilty! He mustn't curse me."

Annette had freed herself; she was drawing back,

but Marie stretched out her arms towards her, and suddenly continued hoarsely: "If I appear before the jury, point your finger at me. You mustn't be silent; I implore you; you mustn't try to spare me too! Call out: 'There is the culprit; she solemnly confessed to me that she was his fate, the abominable creature!' Then I will simply say, 'Yes.' To tell it all myself is *too* difficult. I will be brave, but I am a weak creature."

Annette stood speechless.

Marie gnawed her lips. "Will you do me this service—will you do me this great kindness?" she murmured.

"No!" said Annette. "You may be weak, but you are a vain creature too; I know that now. You are only acting; I can see that; you are not really sorry for him at all; it is only that you like acting to yourself. Whatever the truth is, it surely will come out; but about you in particular I shall say nothing."

"Nothing?" Marie stood as though water were rising to her chin.

"Nothing!" Annette repeated disdainfully.

"Listen to my heart beating," stammered Marie; she did not know what she was saying.

"You are a child," said Annette quietly, "and so lustful. I don't want to see you again."

"What? And your dearest passion was, of course, to kiss the men?" said Marie scornfully.

Annette sat down in the arm-chair by the window and began to cry. Marie waited. Annette shook her head.

"Creature! Devil!" hissed Marie. Then she rushed out of the room, out of the house, back along the street, with the echoes of her steps scampering after her, over the bridge, into the house, and into bed. . . .

"She has become unwell in the night," said Dr. Guichet in astonishment.

"That, after all, everyone does, unless he becomes unwell in the daytime," said M. de Morell with a slight emphasis; and he thrust his hands into his pockets. He and the Baroness had awaited the doctor that morning with special impatience, for it was evident that Marie's condition had taken a turn for the worse.

The doctor, however, was not offended. "That sounds rather foolish; you will pardon me," he said amiably. "What I meant to say was simply that the young lady is undoubtedly very unwell." He recom-

mended, above all things, diversion, and inquired as to the whereabouts of "that filthy rascal", who now, thank God, would be laid by the heels; as far as that went, nothing seemed to have leaked out; he went about a great deal, and he must have heard it, but everything was going just as they would have wished. "We must count on youth and Nature," he said consolingly as he took his leave, "that clears up everything; only these shocks, in all likelihood . . .". He left behind him a certificate to the effect that Mlle Marie de Morell was for the present incapable of appearing in a court of law.

But in the afternoon the jingle of spurs drew near, and her father appeared in the doorway, holding the door open.

"M. le Juge d'instruction, my child, M. de Cadelan, begs that you will not refuse to see him."

But this was, after all, the same M. de Cadelan with whom she had danced, the son of the fat commissary-general—a young man with yellow hair, who was now dressed all in black. He tripped into the room with a dancing step, greatly embarrassed, and as he had a habit of holding his hands before his chest like a person carrying a flower by the stalk, it seemed as though he were constantly on the point of offering it to her.

With difficulty he was persuaded to sit down, and he informed Marie, who gazed at him in some agitation (though what it was that agitated her did not appear), that he had really come only in order to arrest the man-servant, Samuel Bonnie, and the maid, Sophie Génier, on suspicion of being accessories; but he had, nevertheless, taken the opportunity to express his desire to be allowed to inspect the scene of the crime, and on this occasion he hoped also, perhaps not in vain, to obtain an elucidation, or at least a valuable indication from her, Marie; although, of course, he was far from wishing to disregard a medical certificate.

Marie gazed into his watery eyes. M. de Morell was leaning over the foot of the bedstead.

The window, it was true, had already been re-glazed, and the room, of course, had been tidied several times; nevertheless, there was the picture of the scene. . . .

Marie gazed at him fixedly. Her ears slowly flushed a dark red.

And such a picture was important, in order to serve justice, in order, so to speak, that everything should be investigated; he would certainly not fail to do so, although the principal proceedings could not be expected for at least six weeks—six weeks, in Decem-

ber—but the preliminary examination, on the other hand, he was doing his utmost to conclude, and he thought he would soon be able to send the principal accused, and all the more, of course, the man-servant, Samuel Bonnie, and the maid, Sophie Génier, to Paris.

He was silent. And at last Marie moved.

“In chains?” she asked in a stifling voice.

The young man was moved by this *naïveté* to silent and delighted laughter, which absolutely lifted him to his feet; and he turned to M. de Morell, who for his part smiled politely. “Of course not! In chains, you little goose!” he said to Marie. “But they’ve got him as safe as though he were in chains; besides, he’s wounded.”

“All the same, he conquered D’Estange, Papa!”

Again a fit of laughter shook the tall figure in black.

Marie looked away; she did not look at him again, even when he took his leave of her. He begged her not to take the disturbance amiss; another time, he said, he would interview her at a more convenient hour; he didn’t, of course, take a holiday on Sundays. He danced out of the room, taking his flower away with him.

When M. de Morell returned, in order to ask Marie what impression the man had made on her, he found her lying flat, trying, in an incidental sort of way, to deal with the blood which was streaming from her nostrils. He sent for help, but it was a long while before the bleeding was checked—thanks to the energetic assistance of Miss Allen, who had been suffering under the impossibility of being actively helpful, and was now like a soul redeemed.

THEN Marie was left alone. And so the time went by, as she lay in a half-recumbent position, wrapped up on the sofa of her little sitting-room, or in the arm-chair by the window, as she felt inclined; a long time, it seemed, though time had lost all reality for her. Then came days that were as long as many days, and

nights that lasted for many nights; everything came flowing into the present and away again, and she let it flow, just as one watches a useless stream of water; there was no outlook anywhere. All she wanted was to be alone; it was still impossible to make any impression on her; everything that did not fall within the iron circle in which her thoughts went round and round was a burden to her, and precisely such things were avoided by those about her. The greater their efforts to divert her thoughts the deeper she burrowed into her self-absorption, and often feigned weakness when she was only weary, so that they should leave her to herself.

She brooded continually, always over the same thing; she knew it soon by heart; it was no longer an effort to her; it simply carried her away and warmed her through. She waited, but it was a beloved waiting, not unlike that of a pregnant woman, or one, perhaps, who is full of a promised happiness. How many days must yet fall behind her, how many fragments of common days, each like a strip of rind that peeled away from her, until that could shine out which was forming within her, a smothered fire, a longing to act, to serve—ah, to serve! It uplifted her, it bore her onwards, it caressed her very heart, until

many a time she had secretly to rub the knuckles of one hand into the palm of the other in order to endure it. She believed, for she had no notion of her own nature, that what is often thought is already as good as done; it is true, she thought, brooding, but not yet really true. So after all she had an outlook into the future. . . . There was one indeed—a face and a figure appeared there, built up in many a waking dream—that called and needed her, and she waited, and the waiting bore her towards him; and the choking sweetness of this waiting lent a reflected radiance to her face that grew more beautiful with every day that rolled into the past. Often when she was doing her hair in the morning this figure emerged from the background of the mirror, grew larger, and approached her, with reeling steps; there was blood upon him; they had mishandled him, she knew it. . . . She stepped back, so that he could sink to the ground before her, rescued; and now she could see plainly only the face; it was looking up at her, so drowned in suffering that compassion overcame her like an ecstasy. She had imagined this one day as she was brushing her hair, and it came again and again, and challenged the resolution that was striving to mature within her, watched over by her pleasant and feverish

desires, and lightened her waiting, for now she could revel in a solemnity which was strange to her and seemed full of significance.

But above all she waited, and her waiting was invaded by dancing steps and the jingle of spurs. The young magistrate had paid her a number of further visits, but he refused to revert to the inoffensive creature he had been of old, before that time, before—before everything had happened; and even that man she would not have trusted, for he was not a man whom one could respect. Her father came and went, cautiously clanking in and out. Miss Allen often sat with folded hands. As for her mother, Marie felt that she never looked full at her, and yet it seemed to her that she never quite looked away; and this had been going on for a long time. But it was only gradually that she noticed how the three people who were always about her, and whom at one time she had taken for granted, whom as her nearest neighbours in life she had scarcely perceived, had become curiously transparent, and at the same time mysterious, now that she had withdrawn herself from them. Ah, if only a single one of them had known what all three together knew; there would have been no need then to talk, no need to torture one's imagination! So she

thought when the realization of how her mother would demand contrition from her embittered her impulse to confess. But they all had glass pots on their shoulders, she could see into them all, and none of them had eyes for her! So in the Paris house she thought of all the many people who forgathered there; while in other respects, as far as Marie was concerned, it seemed only the old house transported to Paris. She lived on the same floor, in the same sitting-room and bedroom, and once more in bed, or on the sofa, or in the arm-chair; but these people came and went and formed a circle round her, a chattering wall, and compelled her to become its centre; the magistrate with the flower had gone, and in her memory he himself had become a black dancing flower; he had been oppressive, but he was only one, and had not taken up her time like these friends, mere hangers-on with false confidence, who misunderstood her intentions, robbed her of her self-possession, and imperilled the contrition which she had cherished for so long.

How long already? Now for the first time she was forced to struggle; and how long would it be still? No one told her; they assured her, soothingly, that the trial was a long way off yet; oh, they were all blind, and the days, the yesterdays, the to-days, the

to-morrows seemed to her now like knots in an elastic cord, along which she had to feel her way towards her goal; many of them hurried away from her, and many remained, hard, in her hand. Such a day had been the day of the journey to Paris; three days, from morning to night, in the carriage, and only *one* thought, and no relief from it.

At the instance of Mme de Morell they had left Saumur very suddenly. Although the date of the trial was still uncertain, she had declared, peremptorily, that she did not wish to go to Paris only at the last moment, as had been agreed, but in plenty of time to make all preparations; for, as she pointed out to the General, who was surprised to find her suddenly changing her mind, the trial, after all, was a question of life and death, of honour and social existence; also, the change would do Marie good. The girl herself was given to understand that this was the only pretext for the journey; what was to come was not touched upon in her hearing. Meanwhile, the journey had such an obviously good effect upon her, filling her with animation, that M. de Morell amused himself by guessing why she had not ventured to ask them to make it (and, after all, she had not dared to ask them to take her to the place where La Roncière

was); and he took advantage of her propitious mood to tell her that he was really not sorry to have altered their arrangements, despite the difficulties, if the alteration had such good results; but she must now do her very utmost to forget what lay behind her, and as for what lay before her, why, good heavens! that was nothing more than answering a few questions, a mere matter of form when the prisoner had confessed.

“Confessed?” The word slipped out.

But yes! Yes, that was already an old story. “Why, just think, we have known that since the day of the quarrel with poor D’Esterne.” Only they had kept everything from her, even the most satisfactory news. “Yes, long ago. . . .”

A rolling of wheels, a clatter of hooves. . . . Marie closed her eyes.

“When was the last time I saw him?” she said in quite a loud voice.

“Confessed before the magistrate, too, to the whole affair,” said M. de Morell in conclusion.

“Who? D’Esterne?” asked the mother cautiously.

Marie shook her head reflectively. Then: “At the soirée,” she said, smiling.

There was a silence, which persisted; she became

aware of it, as of a weight upon her; she roused herself at once and glanced quickly at her parents; she changed colour and did not know where to look, and with a swift movement she covered the wound on her wrist, on which she was still wearing a plaster.

The pounding of hooves, the rumble of wheels . . . otherwise, nothing. It was the last hurried minute of the sunset; the fiery golden radiance floated lower and lower, lay dying on the earth, became one with it, and was gone. And at the moment when a shudder of chill disenchantment seemed to pass over the world, Nature, for Marie, whose senses could endure no more, discarded her accustomed expression and met her with a grimace. The wood had gone out of the trees, the substance out of the leaves and flowers and grasses, the weight out of the stones, the softness out of the clouds. As the landscape unrolled itself, as they drove onwards, it stood before her like a familiar picture, but all was hollow. There were transparent shells instead of solid stones; empty fabrics, naked veins; the physical substance was as though blown out of existence; on every side mere stalks and ribs and skeletons spread their network against the sky; and they seemed to be waiting. Waiting, so it seemed to Marie, while the spectral world could do

nothing of itself, could not struggle back to life-giving reality; waiting for a renewed and luxuriant vitality, waiting for a magic word . . . for *her*. For she, Marie, who felt that she alone was still warm and solid, must find in herself the redeeming formula, and by it fill this nothingness again, or she too would wither. And love should be humble, not arrogant; and whoso prevented her loved her little; and she herself so loved the whole beautiful world!

The town they were driving into was Blois. They had left the phantasmagoria behind them; here were voices, lights, and warmth; here was their first sleeping-place.

When Marie, who felt a strange drunkenness in her limbs, and whose head was burning, had been put to bed, Miss Allen went back to her; she bent over her, bent quite close, as she always did now. There was something lovable in her gently frowning anxiety, her encouraging serenity. She had to press down the bed; it had risen up round the girl, damp and oppressive; then she looked into her face, which had grown a little peaked; her eyes were larger. . . . "The day after to-morrow," said Miss Allen; and to Marie's questioning glance, opening her bony hand with a significant gesture: "Paris," she said.

Marie smiled. "There is so much that's uncanny hidden in the world," she said. But since Miss Allen persisted in waiting she let her cheek fall back on the pillow with a sigh and pretended to fall asleep.

AND many weeks after this evening there came another evening, and again Miss Allen's head was bowed over the recumbent figure, but this time Marie held it in her hands and gripped it tight, very tight . . . and then she let herself sing into the pillows. "It won't come clear again," she moaned.

“What?” asked Miss Allen. “What won’t, Marie?”

And Marie moaned: “The reality.”

It would not; it was growing more and more murky and distorted.

Marie did not consider that she was ill; on the contrary, she wished that she might have an illness when the burden of thought became too crushing; yet she did not often find it necessary now to plead weakness in self-defence, so that people should leave her alone; but suddenly, after long brooding, she would sink, as it were, beneath the surface, and begin to talk to herself in broken phrases, often starting to her feet with an imperious cry. Indefatigably she conjured up the image of an oppressed and bleeding prisoner; so long as it remained before her eyes she knew surely what it meant. Despair—he had confessed out of despair! And if, perchance, he had done it because he was willing to sacrifice himself for her, then she must be his equal in magnanimity; she must clear him in the eyes of all; that she owed to herself . . . or did she owe it to him to clear herself, to wash herself clean? That she lay there so bewildered, in the heart of this Paris to which they had brought her, this she took almost as an act of hostility on the part of the vast city, which trudged upon its way

and went about its business and was yet as carefree as the people who emerged from it and invaded Marie's refuge.

She herself never left the house now. At first she had now and then accompanied her mother to the church of the neighbouring convent—the church in which Mme de Morell had once learned of the death of her sons. But she felt it was inevitable that she would soon become an object of public interest, and so her barrier of exclusiveness had broken down, and almost anyone was welcome who gave evidence of good intentions. The lesser gentry of the robe might be seen conversing with her, or physicians, or even journalists. It was true that she seldom appeared in the drawing-room; she was ailing, and only favoured individuals were admitted to her; meanwhile, the swarm of relations who resided in Paris came and went without let or hindrance; they had all come flocking to the house immediately, and one by one even those who lived in the provinces arrived; and they all came between Marie and the world. She felt herself hemmed in by them.

But when Maître Oudard came she was left alone with him: Maître Oudard, the advocate, who had been engaged as soon as they arrived, and who was

always free of the house, and who had ended by coming to her at all hours of the day. He was supposed to be her confidant, and professed to be her friend, but she did not like him; she could not feel any confidence in him. The habit of enabling others to see through things had ended by making him impenetrable. He was a small man who wore a coat that was too large for him, and Marie called him "Old Stony," because his face seemed to be built up of pebbles, reddish and blue and green, and his hair was like a thatch of hay. He walked as though he were merely following his shoes, and as often as they pulled him into her room Marie had to repress the fancy that he had come up from underground. He sat beside her, seized her wrist with his wooden hand, held it while he conversed with her, and chewed his teeth well before he began.

No one was so much at home in the higher circles of the nobility as Maître Oudard. Here he was accepted as a master in his profession, because he guessed what he had to know instead of pestering people with questions. He believed that he had the sympathy of all, and behaved accordingly, but in reality all were silently agreed that he was rather insufferable, and contented themselves with admiring him.

Marie was afraid of him. When at last he let go of her wrist she always felt that she had suffered a defeat, and she began to shudder at his power, to which she saw herself delivered. It was he who had brought the doctor to the house, Dr. Olivier, who since then had never ceased to plague her. Yes; Marie had become sharp-sighted, and she had noticed at once that her people were at pains to secure this man's good will; it was not he who sought the favour of the house of Morell, as she was accustomed to see people do. He watched her during long conversations, and then, indeed, she felt that her people offered her support in an ordinary way, but as soon as he wanted to investigate things she was delivered into his hands, and no one protected her. He treated her with consideration, but he came again, and another time appeared with a second doctor, and then the two came with Mme Duhamel, the midwife, and once again Marie had to suffer torture, and all took it as a matter of course, and even thanked the doctor. But they could do such things to Marie now; her capacity for resistance was exhausted; she could scarcely force a smile when Dr. Guichet stroked her cheek when all was over, and prescribed diversion before he took his leave.

For Dr. Guichet was in Paris; he had arrived the

last of all their intimate friends, and like them had been gently welcomed, but with an affected lack of constraint that was never put aside. This was hard on the faithful Jacquemin, who wanted all to admire him for the subtlety with which he had served the house of Morell, doing far more than was required of him. His grievance drove him from group to group in the drawing-room, and finally he stood on one side and significantly stroked his eyebrows.

But D'Estance was silent; in the midst of the solemn silence which greeted his arrival he entered the room, leaning on two sticks, and as soon as he found himself sitting opposite Marie a morbid anger burned in his eyes. She saw the disappointment with which he noted her hollow cheeks, her sunken eyes, and bent forward provocatively.

"Only vestiges of my charms are left," she cried, with her dim smile, "only vestiges, in the face," and suddenly she drummed on the table, and continued to drum on it, even when all those about her looked round. She was taken away to bed.

Next morning she was awakened by the peculiar unrest which prevailed in the house from an early hour, and she knew at once what this portended. It did not surprise her; she had expected it almost

hourly. Nevertheless, the certainty was like a crushing weight upon her heart. With forced gaiety, that found no echo, she complained repeatedly that the house was like a house of mourning. She was left in her room, and although no one really had any time for her, she was under close observation even to-day.

At first she only heard the carriages rolling up and driving away, and listened greedily to the voices echoing from the lower story; but it was not practicable to leave her long in ignorance, for whoever came home wanted to look in on her—first of all her parents, and then all the rest of them—and it was impossible that she should not learn the reason of their feverish excitement.

For three days the tumult never ceased. There was an end of the suppressed excitement, for now the matter was discussed openly; every new turn of the case was gone into, and the prospects of a conviction were constantly being considered in a fresh light. Even the bland Jacquemin became excited; now he could sun himself in the radiance of his success. It was almost proved, he announced, that La Roncière had been in possession of a rope-ladder. A certain Catrine Philibert, the daughter of a deceased rope-maker, had declared that he had promised to give

her his own. In accordance with Jacquemin's indications, she had already been interrogated in Saumur. La Roncière, of course, had once betrayed himself in Jacquemin's presence, and he, Jacquemin, had immediately remembered this; it was indeed all he could think of, for it seemed to him extremely important; and now—well, you see! And he rubbed his eyebrows in his self-satisfaction.

Here D'Estange interposed the remark that there was not only Catrine, but Annette; and who knew what might still be got out of such reluctant witnesses, provided one didn't find the process too disgusting? This Annette, for example—and he gave a hard laugh—hadn't she tried to persuade someone that La Roncière had been with her in the house on the night in question? Well, her sister, Mlle Élise, had flown out at her finely over that, and it was amusing still to remember her rage and the scolding she gave Annette, for up till then she had had no suspicions of the girl's relations with La Roncière. For that matter, it all fitted in excellently, for she, on her side, said D'Estange, had seen La Roncière leave the house, and he had even been seen in the theatre by M. de Morell. This was confirmed by M. de Morell—at least, he believed he had seen him.

Perhaps, then, suggested Dr. Guichet discreetly, Annette may have been the woman who had been creeping over the bridge towards the house when he called for Mignon in passing.

“My daughter was with Mlle Marie; do you remember?” he asked them all. Miss Allen remembered it perfectly. She had only just returned from the court, and was drying her crumpled cheeks. She had had a quarrel with the glazier Jorry, who had declared in court that the hole in the glass had been too small to admit a man’s arm. She was still talking about this when Maître Oudard at last made his appearance.

He appeased the excited lady. The architect also, who had been entrusted with the examination of the house, would not admit that he had observed any such traces as must, in his opinion, have been left by a rope-ladder. But all this was unimportant. The more debatable points there were, in fact, the better. At all events, it was perfectly clear that the defence could not possibly make the court believe in anything so unusual—and it always was unusual—as a false confession. Certainly not in this case! If the accused, after he had confessed, had refused any further information, Maître Barrot would like to prove that he

did so because he didn't know anything more. And it would seem more probable, to everybody else, that he was simply unwilling to betray Bonnie, his accomplice Samuel Bonnie. Maître Oudard bleated as he skated about the room, and then began to chew his teeth.

In such cases, he continued, only emotional motives were decisive; and, of course, his handling of them. . . . His knuckles cracked as he pressed his hands together. This avalanche of lies! he cried; already it was breaking the adversary's neck. And further, *there* stood the La Roncières, who had practically nothing but their swords, and were Belgians, and *here* was the house of Morell, and behind it the whole of the French nobility: Maître Oudard became quite cheery; he had a trick of saying the consoling thing; with beautiful assurance he unfolded the advantages of such a situation, quite as if he had created it himself. After all, he concluded, it was sufficiently significant that the other side had engaged no less a person than Maître Odilon (he called the opposing counsel by his Christian name, half in mockery, it seemed, and half in respectful awe); and really, one couldn't see that they had much chance of success; and that would cost Maître Odilon his little fee. . . . He swallowed the

last words, and then added aloud, speaking gravely, that now, of course, everything depended on the verdict of the handwriting experts.

The following day was spent in taking evidence, and it was evening before the experts made their report. The relatives and the intimate friends of the family sat it out; but the General and his wife, on Marie's account, never remained in court much longer than was necessary, so that Maître Oudard enjoyed the triumph of bringing them the inestimable news. The decision was unanimous that the handwriting of the incriminating letters was identical with that of the accused. Maître Oudard scarcely dissembled the fact that this practically meant victory, and he certainly made no secret of his satisfaction. Nevertheless, he was not without anxiety. The appearance of Marie as the chief witness and the joint prosecutor could be postponed no longer, and here something disquieted him; for he was sensitive to the slightest change of wind, whether in his favour or against it. He had noted, too—though of this he never said a word—the respect which La Roncière's bearing and character had won from all the judges and counsel; and although he himself was quite clear that this could not in any way affect the final result, but could at most

merely make things a little less unpleasant for the accused, it none the less annoyed him; he had a passion for moral effect.

As usual, he held Marie's wrist while he gave her a summary of the proceedings and advised her. He wanted to give her some final instructions, but he could find no thoroughfare to her mind. She stared at "Old Stony" and heard nothing; she tried to grasp the impossible thing he had told her; that the world confirmed her in her injustice, and left her caught in it. She could not understand it; only too keenly awake, and yet, as it were, in the dark, she gazed into the speaker's face; perplexity bored its way through her head like a gimlet, and suddenly the torture became so great that she could hardly sit still. She stared at "Old Stony's" nose, his broad, fleshy, flabby nose, which seemed the only living thing about him, and felt an irrepressible longing to smack it with the heel of her hand; that would give her air . . . air. . . .

Maître Oudard decided that he would first of all speak privately with her parents; he begged them to follow him, released Marie's hand, and took his leave of her; and they all went out of the room.

But after a few minutes Miss Allen called them back in alarm; she had found Marie trying in vain

to staunch the blood that was running in thin streams from her nostrils.

"I think," said Marie, with a rattle in her voice, "I think I've hit myself," and she swung her arm.

Maître Oudard, in the midst of the general confusion, hurried out to fetch Dr. Olivier, who had just made his appearance in the drawing-room. What a fortunate chance! The doctor carefully stopped the bleeding, then Maître Oudard led him away.

An hour later the door of the drawing-room opened; the General and his wife were sitting there alone, absorbed in conversation; it was Marie who entered. Her gait was unsteady; it was obvious that she had left her bed only with the greatest difficulty. She sat down, and said in a subdued voice: "Go on, Papa, I must hear everything."

Wouldn't it be better to do so later? suggested the General. She knew the most important thing without further telling; she had just been informed of that.

Marie nodded several times as though to herself. There was a silence.

"Why are you crying, Marie?" asked the Baroness gently. "Out of compassion?"

"Why else?" murmured the General.

Marie, crying silently, said: "He hates me."

"Does that hurt you so?"

"That he should have to hate me," said Marie as though in a dream.

"We are not masters of our feelings, my child——"

"We women?——Don't go, Papa. You mean we women, Mama?"

"I meant to say, Marie, we human beings. You have nothing to reproach yourself with, nothing at all!"

"No, but I am guilty, Mama!" cried Marie, and she pressed her mother's hands. "I can't help it; but I am guilty," she whispered, with chattering teeth. "Forgive me; you see, I've no experience; I thought he would be different—and everything; I could have prevented it, I must. . . ."

"How so, Marie? Please control yourself!" said the Baroness imperatively.

Marie was silent. Incredulity, aversion, misery, and defiance were all conveyed by one glance. Then she ran both her hands through her hair and sighed: "I wish I were not alive."

"You are talking idly, my dear Marie," replied the Baroness composedly. "We must try to justify our existence, instead of submissively accepting it.

. . . How, for example, can you tell what purpose it serves in the hand of the Creator?"

But it was evident that Marie could no longer follow what was said to her. She excused herself in a hoarse whisper and tottered out of the room. Her face seemed shrunken as though with cold.

The General had already unobtrusively taken his exit. Mme de Morell made as though to follow him, but she stopped short at the door; and with bent and serious brow, her arms crossed over her bosom, she paced for a long time to and fro, while upstairs the now speechless girl was again put to bed by Miss Allen.

The dream that came to her that night led her to a rustling meadow, where she saw wild animals playing at ball. The ball changed into a head. The players butted it with their own heads and tossed it clumsily into the air; it flew hither and thither, and then it was no longer a head, but a helmet, which stood in the air for a moment, while the startled players trotted together, and then it rushed down upon Marie, who seemed to be rooted fast in the midst of the animals, and extinguished her. Then it rose again, and she grew once more to her natural size; finally, it lifted itself from her head and once more hovered over her,

only to dash itself down on her again, and this time she collapsed, so that its edges bit into the earth. It released her only when she woke, whimpering.

Then in her profound exhaustion she fell asleep, but she slept now as though to sleep were a labour. She slept until the sun was high in the heavens.

About noon her mother entered the room and placed a little basket before her on the bed; in the basket a little cat was turning round and round.

"You once wished you had some animal, do you remember? So perhaps this will please you."

Marie could not help caressing the kitten, but she said: "Oh, Mama, I think perhaps it's only a bother," and she raised her eyes; they were dim with tears.

Mme de Morell looked into them; she was somewhat at a loss. "Do you think so?" she said, mechanically stroking the kitten's head. "But to care for an alien life ought to be not a bother, but a joy."

"And the responsibility, Mama?"

"What makes you so thoughtful, Marie? Responsibility is, of course, no little thing, but I will readily trust you with the responsibility for a white kitten, my child. After all, you are responsible for a human being," she continued, sitting on the edge of the bed.

Marie had taken the kitten in her arms and was rubbing its neck with her chin.

"For yourself I mean," added her mother.

"Of course," said Marie, And after a little while she spoke again, forgetting the kitten: "Mama, you told me yesterday that we can't know exactly what God wants to do with our life. But if we were simply to submit—to accept it, you said yesterday—how could we bear the responsibility then?"

"I don't understand what you mean, my child. Are you imagining a humility that is to be irresponsible, or what? Give me an example; what is it that you don't understand?"

"Well, it is just the same thing, isn't it, Mama?" she murmured into the kitten's face. "For example, our prosecution, don't you think? If La . . . if, after all, he is perhaps innocent——"

"Then it was a visitation," replied Mme de Morell promptly.

"But the person through whom it happened, Mama? If he doesn't know what it is all about, and that it was meant as a visitation, and that he is only an instrument, would he have still to believe——"

"For Christ's sake, my child!" Her mother interrupted her, and stood up. "What pernicious ideas are

you cherishing? That the Almighty should use a crime, which He makes one person commit, in order to punish another? No; if He wishes to chastise one person He does not therefore burden another with sin! No; whoever feels tempted to such an action must regard the temptation as a test, and he who commits it has destroyed his eternal happiness!"

Mme de Morell turned from the window, for she heard the kitten make a leap; it had sprung in terror from Marie's breast. Marie had lost consciousness.

It so happened that Dr. Olivier was announced at this moment; he arrived in company with Maître Oudard. The advocate had found time to visit him, even during the brief midday interval, in order to ask him for his opinion of Marie, as the doctor had urged him to do on the previous day after the nose-bleeding; and since Olivier wished to make yet another examination, he had at once accompanied the doctor. The fainting-fit, of which he was a witness, was enough for the physician. He certified that he had found Mlle Marie de Morell in the crisis of a convulsive affection of the nerves, which recurred several times in the day, and more or less at the same times. Only between the hours of midnight and four in the morning did she recover the full possession of her

senses (so he was informed, and so Oudard told him), and become capable of answering questions. He added a description of the experiment he himself had made in order to convince himself that there was no question of simulation.

An earlier opinion, which he had given in court, in conjunction with a colleague, had merely certified that Marie's condition would not permit her regular attendance during the trial. On the strength of this opinion Maître Oudard had not permitted her to appear at all during the first three days, but this state of affairs could continue no longer, and he therefore required a fresh certificate, which should excuse the girl from appearing in court. However, his hopes were only half fulfilled. The President, indeed, conceded that at her first appearance La Roncière should be sent out of court, in consideration of the shock which the sight of him would give the young lady, and he consented also that the public should be excluded, but he had no objection to postponing the session till midnight, at which hour, according to the certificate, the witness would be completely responsible.

Maître Oudard brought the news about nine o'clock, and at once, with great adroitness, began to

prepare Marie for the ordeal, while her parents stood beside her waiting. Now she must tell the judge what she had so often told him; but she need not be afraid of any encounter, nor need she fear intrusive eyes; it would really be almost comfortable. But it seemed that his consideration was superfluous. No sooner did the girl realize what was required of her than she consented, firmly and without hesitation. They could see that she was fighting against a feeling of dizziness, and her face seemed to turn to stone; and they might also have seen that something was happening in her eyes, as when water is absorbed by sand; but she began at once to get ready; she decked herself out, often waving whatever she was holding in her hand, and sang with open mouth. No one interfered with her, and she took her time, but three-quarters of an hour before midnight the carriage glided through the noisy streets. In the heavens the stars were twinkling like a celestial snowfall.

Then she sat at the window of the waiting-room, whose door opened into the court; her father, who intended to remain there, her mother, who was to accompany her, and Maître Oudard moved silently about the room. Marie's hands were trembling so that she held her finger-tips between her teeth. She heard

voices; she saw the court-room filled with a glow of light that glittered on distended uniforms; the gentlemen of the robe sat motionless; she could see the breath drifting above all those heads; then creaking footsteps approached, and behind crossed swords *his* figure reared itself, white, bloodless, and haggard. . . . Her tongue grew stiff; her tongue, over which the word ought to roll and leap like a ball of steel into their midst . . . and she sprang up and tore her hand loose.

Maître Oudard was just seizing it. The time had come. Her mother supported her on the left.

La Roncière was nowhere behind that narrow door. She could see that! A cold breath seemed to strike her. The greater part of the vast room, divided off by a barrier, was full of a confusion of empty chairs; in the part which she entered many candles were burning, with lustreless flames. Along the raised table sat the judges (the President bowed slightly from his height); beneath them sat the jury in a row; before the jury was a square enclosure, empty; and into this she and her mother and Maître Oudard were shown; they sat in chairs that were placed some little distance apart. But to the left and the right, and raised above them, sat two other men: one was the Advocate-

General, M. de St. Omer; she knew the name, for Maître Oudard had often told her that he was of the same political party as himself; the other, who was now bowing profoundly, was Odilon Barrot.

Odilon Barrot was the greatest orator of the French Bar. He was a thickset man, with black eyes and white hair, and a huge slit of a mouth, so flexible that it was like a sinewy animal. His arms hung loosely at his sides. He was famed for his brazen voice, and the skill with which he handled men. The formalities were quickly dispatched. The President gave Marie permission to remain seated during the coming session, and he also gave her certain brief instructions. He was a corpulent man with a scarlet face and bushy white eyebrows. He looked tired. A certain insufficiency, of which he seemed to be conscious, was concealed by benevolence. He laughed often, a hearty, luscious laugh. He addressed Marie in a fatherly tone.

It was probably known to her that the accused had confessed. . . . It was, therefore, no longer necessary to prove his guilt; she might remember that, M. de St. Omer interposed.

. . . Only, said the President, nodding, the learned

counsel for the defence must prove what he asserted, namely, that the said confession was for some reason or other——

Like a bell the words rang out: “For a *definite* reason.” Marie looked at Maître Barrot; he had not moved.

“For a definite reason,” said the speaker in a surly tone, and continued: “was for a definite reason a false confession; and, in order to examine whether this is probable, you, Marie, must now give your assistance to the court.”

The President now asked the clerk, who sat at the small end of the table, to read over the records containing the depositions which she had made at the time of the preliminary inquiry. Then he asked her, did she so express herself?

“Yes.”

And was there anything she could add to this evidence?

“No.”

Well, then—he stretched himself in a business-like manner, and emitted his encouraging laugh—would she tell the court: could she think of any single reason such as had been mentioned?

“Yes.”

Here Maître Oudard asked leave to speak, but the President had already asked:

“What?”

“He has done it for the sake of someone else.”

“But you recognized him!” interjected M. de St. Omer.

“Let us leave that for the moment,” said the President, and then: “For the sake of someone else; but for whom?”

“I beg to ask, first of all, why?”

Again she was startled by the deep, bell-like voice; but Maître Oudard sat quite motionless.

“Why?” Marie answered him. “For love.”

“But surely he was in love with you!” cried the President.

And Marie, with shining eyes, replied: “Of course he was.”

There was an awkward pause. Marie, who had half risen to her feet, felt herself hastily dragged back to her chair; Maître Oudard had seized her wrist. Then he himself sprang to his feet.

But Maître Barrot was too quick for him. He spoke with deliberate calm. “But it must surely be a man for whom he has taken the crime on himself!” He turned very earnestly to Marie, and the still effort-

lessly thundering voice had suddenly assumed an expression of absolute tenderness.

Marie had scarcely power to nod; she gazed at him lifelessly.

Meanwhile, M. de St. Omer had claimed the ear of the court. He wrapped his small figure carefully in his open robe, and addressed himself to the jury. The purpose of this nocturnal session, he said, was almost exclusively that they might make the acquaintance of the principal witness. It was hardly possible that any fresh evidence should be elicited when practically everything had been brought to light; the only point in question was the impression which the witness produced. And it was precisely this impression, to which no one could be immune, and the comparison resulting therefrom, which was only too palpable and insistent, that he wished, as counsel for the prosecution, to define, briefly, for the gentlemen of the jury.

He was really brief, since the public was absent; but for this very reason he ventured to go farther than would otherwise have been possible. He contrasted the innocence of the young girl, who was still hardly more than a convent schoolgirl, who had never yet read a novel, and might truly be likened to a fresh dewy bud, with the figure of the monster of

whom even the witness for the defendant, Ambert, had been forced to admit that the street-walkers called out his name after him, and whose wicked hand had, as it were, destroyed the bud, perhaps forever. "Look at the witness! Who does not feel that she is utterly bewildered and confused in the inmost recesses of her soul? That she has been driven, as it were, out of the world, out of the world of her disconsolate family, by which she was sheltered and cherished? It is for you, gentlemen of the jury," he concluded, "it is for you to choose between a spotless maiden and a coarse lieutenant!"

Odilon Barrot cried out with such a mighty voice that the flames of all the candles dipped, and the young clerk started in alarm, as he protested against the terms employed by St. Omer; he had exceeded his competence!

The President immediately uttered a reprimand. M. de St. Omer stroked his carefully groomed bald head with a hand on which glittered a number of coloured gems, and begged permission, readjusting his beret, to ask the young lady the questions which had already been decided upon.

Maître Oudard desisted, on this occasion, from coming to his colleague's assistance. In the absence

of the accused he preferred not to play an active part, in order to avoid the impression that Marie could be in any need of defence.

She was disappointed. What was happening here did not respond to her expectations: this wrangling of men over her head; there was nothing here to take hold of; her resolution seemed to crumble away; this was all so dry. . . . She suddenly became absorbed in the appearance of the clerk; he had velvety eyes, and his face had such an obstinate expression that it seemed as though he could hardly endure being compelled always to write what others said. She thought he looked at her threateningly every time he had to write down anything fresh.

The President loudly called her name. He asked her whether she was aware that the domiciliary search had revealed nothing, nor had the search of her parent's house in Paris, and whether she could say anything in explanation of this?

"Was there a search?" whispered Marie.

"You see! . . ." Maître Oudard turned to the jury with a guileless gesture.

Now M. de St. Omer asked her whether the man who was on the bridge—she knew whom he meant?—well, had he thrown anything into the water?

"What was he supposed to have thrown?" she asked pleasantly.

"Well, an article of clothing or something of the sort."

"Oh, my nightdress!" and suddenly the tears welled in her eyes.

"The question is indeed enigmatical," said Maître Barrot, in a great hectoring voice, "for the mysterious man on the bridge appeared precisely six days earlier than the alleged theft of the nightdress."

Maître Oudard replied excitedly that such an interval as the Advocate-General presumed to have occurred was doubtless within the range of possibilities; only one must take into consideration the degree in which the witness's powers of recollection had been affected.

"But hardly those of the parents as well?" said Maître Barrot. "They were present. I think a direct question is superfluous." He sat down. Mlle de Morell had been alarmed without reason.

"Now, I don't think you need to cry at the mere recollection," said the President reprovingly to Marie, "considering it is so long ago. You are said to have been dancing again a fortnight later. They ought to have reflected that that would be bad for you."

"I must protest against that remark!" cried Maître Oudard, "that is, so far as it concerns the parents; otherwise, of course, I do not for a moment mean——" He sat down again, hesitating.

Maître Barrot, his hands hanging by his sides, was already on his feet: "I think there is a mistake here!" he cried. "The young lady"—and he turned to Marie, his broad shoulders moving after him, and now again his voice had a milder tone—"the young lady, I am sure, was dancing only to deceive her parents, in the kindest way. It must have taken much courage, much love, and much blind confidence in order not to conceal what had happened, but to divulge it, and how, in the first place, it had really come about; was not that so? Perhaps this young lady had little else to rely on besides this courage; she was too young, and she had not much strength; but it was courage. And after she had found the courage, and it was all divulged, and she saw her parents distressed and bewildered, as, of course, all those were who were implicated in the affair, then she found the self-sacrificing courage to undo so much as lay in her power. For that reason she even went so far as to dance, and the more difficult it became, the more alluring it was, nevertheless, to have the strength. And if now, in

looking back, she was misjudged on this account, that is nothing to her. The thought that a thing is done for someone else will help even one who is suffering justly to accomplish it, however difficult it may be; for this thought takes a load off the conscience. But to one who is suffering unjustly, and whose suffering seems more than flesh and blood can bear if he does not know for whom and why—to him all becomes easy so soon as he *does* know, and he will cheerfully endure the hardest fate; for him self-abnegation is a profounder consolation. . . . I believe I am not mistaken in the young lady?”

Marie had risen long before he ended. The skin of her body was burning, and she felt such shame as she had never felt in her life. She could not help thinking of a baptism at which she had been present years before; the old priest who was baptizing the child spoke at first in loud, incisive tones; but as he bent over the little head his voice grew suddenly as gentle and as strangely eloquent as the voice that she now heard, when it said: *the conscience*. There was a holiness in that word, a holiness, as it were, shone out of it, and overcame her, so clear did it make all that was dark in her. She looked into Maître Barrot’s face, his strong, vigorous face, and it seemed

to her as though she herself had become wise, because the measure of her years had been found, and for a moment she felt herself subdued to the verge of subordination; with this man was understanding and protection and acceptation even of herself, as great as the surrender which he demanded; oh, to earn peace with this man's praise! there was a lovely radiance in the thought. . . . But she could not keep to it of herself; in a moment it had all gone by: again the loud voice was pouring down on her; again her rebellious heart was flooded with devilry and mean perversity, with empty spite, and the feeling that she knew what no one else knew; and she no longer understood her emotion. She fought against his compassion; she would have her own way, her own. . . . "No, indeed not, Monsieur," she breathed, and made a little gesture with her hand.

From the shadows beside her there now rose a man whom hitherto she had hardly noticed: the counsel representing Samuel Bonnie and the maid. With an animosity against Maître Barrot which seemed to surprise none of those present, he protested that the tactics which his honoured colleague had thought fit to adopt in dealing with the principal witness had presumably some meaning which to the merely prac-

tical intelligence was not accessible without further explanation; and, in any case, he for his part must now at last insist on its being established—and apparently the information was not readily to be obtained—when the witness had last left her room on the evening of the fourth of September.

Maître Oudard gazed at the rather grubby-looking man with a bored expression, and asked: “What precisely do you mean by that?”

“I mean this,” said the other angrily: “that she might very well have been in the man-servant’s room, which, as we know, was over her own, while he had gone to the theatre to bring his employers home.”

“A rope-ladder hanging from the window,” interposed M. de St. Omer, “—for that, I suppose, is what it amounts to—could scarcely have escaped the notice of persons coming to the house.” He shook his head impatiently.

The other saw this and retorted, in a voice like that of an angry cat: “I mean nothing so idiotic! What I assert is that the ladder, as agreed, lay ready on the outer window-sill, where the servant could not notice it, for the shutters were already closed. And that a thin cord was hanging down the wall of the house,

which might very well escape an unsuspecting person in the darkness."

"A somewhat daring hypothesis," said the President disapprovingly.

"It seems to me also a trifle too aggressive," said Odilon Barrot, conscientiously. Continuing, he made it clear that he did not take the matter very seriously; but he pretended to do so, for the other's excitability seemed always to give him a secret and irresistible pleasure. Might it not rather be the case, he asked, that the maid Sophie, who was in the house, had been busy about the young lady's room while the young lady left it—and perhaps Miss Allen, too, was absent?

His malicious objectivity was so perfect that even M. de St. Omer was unsuspecting. "At all events," he asserted, "the window-pane was broken."

"That, after all, might have been a piece of deception too," reflected the President.

Maître Oudard objected violently; all the witnesses declared that the fragments of glass had lain inside the room.

Suddenly Marie tore herself free, and her eyes glittered unnaturally as she cried abruptly: "That's nothing! If I just opened the window, so—" (and,

forgetful of herself, she gesticulated) "and struck it from outside, inwards, the pieces would still lie in the room." She stood where she was, covered with perspiration. She had taken three quick steps forward.

A breathless silence followed. It was broken by the Advocate-General. "How comes it, Made-moiselle," he inquired in a tone of jesting irony rather than seriously, "how comes it that *you* should be the person to whom this remarkable refutation occurs?"

Then Marie's mother rose to her feet. She was conscious of Maître Barrot's eyes, which all this time had been fixed, not on Marie, but on her, on her forehead; she thrust out the fingers of one hand; with the other she convulsively clutched the picture of the Madonna, which she wore on a chain; and she said, in icy accents:

"Even if it is contrary to usage, my daughter must express herself regardless of consequences. She knows only that she is trying to help justice. She is, of course, innocent."

The President threw up both his arms.

M. de Morell had appeared at the side door; he went hastily to the Baroness, who was evidently feel-

ing indisposed. Maître Oudard, too, gave his whole attention to assisting her; the picture of the Madonna lay torn from its chain in her lap; he put it in his pocket. The two men offered her their arms, but she declined them, and remained.

They stood beside her chair. The President, in order to preserve the conventions, warned Marie that a confrontation with the accused was unavoidable. Did she feel that she was equal to it?

"I am equal to it. I will be equal to it, even if it is to-morrow," she replied. A wave of feverish heat swept over her.

"It must, of course, be to-morrow."

And then the court was adjourned.

The last thing the Baroness saw before she made towards the door was the profound bow with which Maître Barrot honoured her.

She was supported only by the General. Marie and Maître Oudard followed her in silence. Beside the carriage, Maître Oudard handed over the medalion to M. de Morell, and promised to fetch Marie on the following day; that done, he quickly took his leave.

During the drive home M. de Morell was assiduous for his wife's comfort; he would not be silent,

and she let him talk. When they reached the house she declared at once that she was quite well; she wanted only to sleep. They must be rested for to-morrow morning; and she sent Marie to bed expressly. Marie murmured a good night and obeyed.

In the small hours of the morning Miss Allen heard her sobbing. She was awakened by the sound. She did not know how long she had slept, and she did not take time to look at the clock; she threw on her dressing-gown and went into the girl's room.

Marie was lying on her face under her coverlet, with her head pressed into the crook of her arm; she was crying uncontrollably. She drew back from Miss Allen's touch; the governess had seated herself on the edge of the bed. But her sobbing did not stop; on the contrary, the more compassionately Miss Allen spoke the more violent it grew, until at last she was uttering convulsively protracted cries. Finally, Miss Allen, in her impotence, could think of nothing better than to hold the girl tight, in order to help her to bear the attack. Then slowly Marie propped herself up. She stared at Miss Allen with swollen eyes, wiped them, and leant her face against Miss Allen's shoulder, still shaken by stifled sobs. Miss Allen held her

still; her nightdress was damp. Once more she began to comfort her, and gradually to speak with greater coherence. How could she so lose control over herself? And over such an unworthy object. "Upon my honour!" And then in a more intimate tone: it was a good thing he would never know that she had ever so far forgotten her pride; such things did happen, yes, of course, but it would be unendurable to think of his triumphing after all instead of atoning for his outrageous conduct. . . .

Marie's body relaxed with all its weight against Miss Allen, and the words fluttered voicelessly at her ear: "I did it."

Miss Allen released herself gently and cried: "What did you 'do' to him, Marie? Made eyes at him! That wasn't right, but it was no crime, and to have pleased him is no crime——"

"But to have written the letters," moaned the girl, with chattering teeth, "all the letters . . . myself. . . ."

"Dear God, the girl's quite beside herself! Marie, dear! I'll just fetch a wet cloth. If I could only understand what there is about such a man that affects you so——"

"He loves me!" cried Marie, and sobbed. She

clutched Miss Allen as though the repeated convulsions threatened to tear her limb from limb; her panting mouth stood open for some seconds, and she sought Miss Allen's throat and face as though to stop it against them; then her teeth closed on the governess's hair, and finally she flung herself round, whimpering, on the bed.

Miss Allen stood up, she was pale and struggling to find words. But she could think of nothing better to do than to conquer her repugnance and do her duty by covering Marie more carefully. The girl was now submissive. Miss Allen went back to her room; it was only now that she noticed that it was nearly dawn. She had left the door open, but there was no sound within. She lay stiffly in her bed, and thought to herself that not a word should ever pass her lips. But how, how was it possible? And she stretched herself out still more stiffly.

An hour might have passed, and she was gradually growing calmer, when there was a knocking on the outer door: Madame was unwell, and she wished to see Mademoiselle; would Mademoiselle please come to her? Miss Allen rose instantly and waked Marie, not without some difficulty.

Marie obeyed with a sort of resentful refusal to

hurry. She dressed herself fully before she accompanied Miss Allen.

Her mother was sitting up in bed, supported by her pillows. Her old heart trouble had brought about a fit of breathlessness; it was not worse than usual, but was more persistent, and the medicine she was accustomed to take had not yet begun to take effect. The General had sent first for Dr. Guichet and then for their Paris family doctor, but neither had yet arrived, and for a time Mme de Morell was afraid that she might lose consciousness. She had then asked for Marie.

When her daughter appeared she stretched out her hand to her, thanked Miss Allen with the other, and begged them all to go out. M. de Morell was the last to leave the room, and, with a sense of reverence and a sudden solemn foreboding, he saw to it that no one waited in the corridor; he then sought his own room.

"Be so good as to draw back the curtains," said Mme de Morell. Her voice was hardly audible.

Marie did as she was asked; then her mother again stretched out her hand to her, and she approached the bed. There were clothes on the chair beside the bed, and she suddenly felt a reluctance to

sit on the edge of the bed. After a moment's hesitation she kneeled on the floor, leaning against the edge of the bed, and questioning her mother with her eyes.

"There is something I still want to say to you, my child," said the Baroness with an effort.

"Still, Mama?"

The Baroness smiled against her will. "Still, dear child," she continued. "I have still something to say . . . perhaps . . . before I die."

She turned her head aside and looked out of the window; she felt for Marie's hand, placed it under her own wasted hands, and pressed it irresolutely several times.

"There comes the day, Marie, and I want to say something more to you. It is only quite a little thing. It is often more difficult to be silent. Understand me. To speak unburdens one finally, for good. But to be silent . . . and to bear that silence like a burden . . . do you understand . . . for the sake of others whom you love . . . that may be a more difficult atonement, for there is no end to it, as there is to earthly atonement. If you will only speak out of a purified heart——" and she clasped Marie's hand, which she had stroked so long, with all her strength

—“My beloved child, if only you come to a righteous frame of mind!”

She released the girl, breathing with difficulty. Then she passed her hand across her forehead and covered her eyes. “That was what I wanted to say, Marie. Now go.”

Marie rose and went out. Outside she lingered along the corridor, as though reflecting; the corridor was empty from end to end; she hooked her fingers together before her breast and tore them apart with a shriek.

Those in the house thought they heard a cry of terror, and yet it did not sound like that; and they hurried up from all directions. Marie had at first flown down the stairs as though she felt that she must hide herself, but when she reached the bottom she unbolted the front door.

It was snowing no longer. Through the slush of the streets—the few streets with which she was familiar—she ran with her head bowed against the dripping fog.

The Church of the Carmelites was already open; a few people who had come to pray were moving about at the farther end. Marie slipped into a lateral chapel; here stood the altar of a beautiful Madonna,

who seemed as though quickening to life in the grey light of morning. Even to-day the sight of her gave Marie such pleasure that she knelt before her comforted.

“Oh, how I wish that you were really here!” she whispered after gazing awhile. “In the convent I often thought you were. Help me, after all, to find a way out. It is only that I am so torn in two, and everywhere I see people against me, and then it rankles in me like spite, but it is not that I am cunning. I don’t even want to win you over with words. I had no happiness at all behind me, nothing beautiful, as something to hold fast; you know, something to remember; so one just looks forward. My God! Mama can’t understand all that, and I can’t explain it to her, because even before this she thought I was bad. Advise me; mustn’t she be wrong if she never, never wants anything happier? After all, they always get what they want; it isn’t only that they have so much experience. Why is it? Does everything depend on experience? If I had only had ever so little I shouldn’t have become so miserable. How I have longed that I might be taken ill, and tell myself: Mama won’t need to go to-day! But youth has no mercy on one. And all the same it goes on, so that

one can't bear it, and I wish, often I've wished I could tear it out of me, like an aching tooth.

“Don't let me seem insignificant, so that they won't believe the truth when I tell it. Oh, and give me *my* truth; love and atonement are torturing me so! Can I leave him in prison when I love him?—and, if I love him, is he to look on me as a criminal? Make me, I beseech you, what he wishes me to be. For he is allotted to me, and that is the only reason why I go on living. Believe that of me! I beseech you, do truly believe that of me! Or: I won't ask you, I want to be able to thank you; make it so that I shall have to thank you, passionately! Make it so! Take this hideous behaviour from me, rescue me from this jungle! Give me light to see my way through it! Give me light! Save me from my will!”

ABOUT the same hour Maître Barrot, Ambert, and Annette had already gathered about La Roncière. The Advocate had decided to call the prisoner's friend and the girl; they were the only persons on whom he could count for support. For although he had been engaged for the defence by Emil's father,

the latter was obviously far more concerned to save his name from dishonour than to save his son personally; and it had quickly become evident that the mother was simply out of the question.

It was one of the mitigations which were granted the accused that his friends were allowed to see him almost without restriction. He was lodged in a wing of the Palais de Justice, to which prisoners undergoing examination were commonly transferred for convenience, at all events during the days of their trial. Here, too, were the most comfortable cells. His was like a small living-room, modestly furnished.

There, despite the early hour, he was already sitting at the writing-table when his visitors were admitted. Before him lay several sheets of paper, which were covered with drawings, of which some were finished in minute detail; they were fantastic sketches of house-fronts, views of churches and palaces, with which he whiled away the time. He had fallen into a habit of working at them even while people were speaking to him; he was still able to give them his attention, and they soothed him. Even to-day he turned to them as usual after he had risen to greet his friends as they entered. They loosed a storm about his head to-day, in a last effort to make an impres-

sion on the unteachable fellow; they brought forward arguments and heaped appeal upon appeal, but he went on shading his drawing; and the strangest thing was that in this there was no discourtesy, but something like indulgence. His legs were crossed; his paper, with its hard backing, was half withdrawn from the table and propped upon his thigh; and so he remained, carefully selecting his pencils, and it was only when the Advocate appealed to him with something unfamiliar in his tone that he pushed back his work and his chair in order to look at Maître Barrot, who stood before him, easily erect; and only his mouth was speaking.

“M. de la Roncière, I am speaking to you in deadly earnest! You may say that I offend you, but I *must* offend you at this juncture. Listen to me!

“I might have laid myself out to outwit you. Possibly I might have induced you to admit that you had made a false confession; and then I should have been forced to make use of the admission, even against your will. The original and honourable formula runs that all of us in court, prosecutors and defenders alike, are there only to do justice between us. That formula, of course, has long been trampled underfoot by ‘the law,’ but the gentry who constitute ‘the

law' could not very well get out of it if one were to insist on it. Now, in your case, all this would be pointless. Even if I could come forward and say 'he has confided to me this and that and the other', we should be no farther; that is, unless you yourself were to confirm it. The circumstantial evidence, or what one takes to be such, is so incriminating for you that such a recantation at the end would be of no more value than a lie adhered to from the beginning. Do you understand? Nothing would be gained by it!

"On the other hand, I had before me to-night—we all know of whom I am speaking—a picture of bewilderment that gives us reason to hope; at all events, there was a spiritual conflict. For all that, it can only amount to what Mlle Annette has told us: 'I want to say "yes"; to tell the whole story is *too* difficult!' And for that reason—please understand me!—it is necessary that *you* should recant; that is, that you should *wish* to recant; that you should support the recantation with evidence that can otherwise be known to no one. And out of this an attack must be developed, without which I cannot save you!"

"I *am* saved."

That was all that Emil replied, and then a silence

fell, until suddenly the warder appeared in the doorway, silently summoning him, and Emil sprang to his feet.

"It is time!" he cried. "Off we go! And believe me, Maître Barrot, everything is all right. Only I can't be enthusiastic."

"Quick march, all!" he cried, and laid his arm round Ambert's shoulders. "Old man," he whispered, "it wasn't so bad after all, you know, that time with you!"

"Annette!" He seized her hands. "I want you to understand me clearly. There is someone who loves me; I can't let her down. That above all. Above all things. One is like that. I am like that. What does it matter to me if I have to stare at the wall for five years? . . . There are very beautiful fossils. . . . But, of course, I love you, you silly thing." And his moustache covered her small, quivering lips.

Now he was standing before the jury, and in the waiting-room, behind the half-open door, stood Marie, and saw him again. His face was more angular, his eyes paler, his moustache more untidy than of old. And he seemed to have grown smaller; yes, that was it. But it was as though he had no need, now, to be so big. She heard his firm, collected voice; she

took it in with a vacant smile, a cunning smile; he doesn't need me, he doesn't need me at all; he doesn't need me in life, he doesn't need me in his dreams. She clenched her toes, and closed her eyes, and made a clicking sound with her tongue, while her mouth sprang open; and she would have stumbled if her father, who was just then approaching her, had not supported her.

He told her that she would probably be called almost directly.

They waited alone. Then M. de Morell clasped his two great hands over Marie's hand and laid his forehead on them. "Child," he said, "Marie, I love my profession so; do you realize?" And suddenly the tears welled from his eyes.

He pulled himself together. They were coming for her already. In the doorway Marie stopped; then she went on with a different bearing, as though she were wearing a gigantic hat.

In the cold light of day the court-room was unfamiliar to her. From the crowded space allotted to the public a toneless babble struck upon her ears. With their backs to the barrier, which railed off the public seats, there stood to-day two rows of chairs in a half-circle. They were occupied by privileged

spectators, persons of rank, and, above all, her relatives; there she saw her family; wealth, rank, and position were assembled there, decked with jewels and the stars of orders: the Marquis Jules de Mornay, member of the Chamber of Deputies and the Ministerial Resident at the Court of Baden; the Comte Charles de Mornay, both brothers of her mother; the Marquise de Mornay, daughter of Marshal Soult; MM. Auguste de Saint-Aignan and Théodore de Lameth; the Vicomte de Montesquiou, brother-in-law of MM. de Mornay; her grandparents, the Duke and Duchess of Vicenza; and the Comte de Mornay-d'Andreville, a cardinal.

Marie wanted to go to Maître Oudard and hold out her wrist, but he didn't take it; he behaved as though he didn't understand what she was doing. (Everything was different and was bewildering her.) He had taken his place on the floor of the court, though he was next to M. de St. Omer, just as the advocate representing Samuel and the maid was sitting opposite, next to Maître Barrot. And from that direction, from the farther end of the semicircle in which the distinguished spectators were sitting, and between which and the jury Marie and her father were given chairs, there now came towards her, moving towards

the middle of the semicircle, an old woman, or was she a lady? She was covered with golden ornaments, although her clothes were threadbare; she walked with a curious, bobbing gait, as Marie had done, but more heavily; and even as she snatched at the girl's hand her childish, fanatical face was bathed in readily flowing tears.

"I am his mother," she cried without preface, and dragged at Marie's hand, pressing it against her bosom. "You are a woman, like myself—like myself," she cried plaintively, swallowing her streaming tears. "Feel a mother's heart, the afflicted heart of a mother; give him back to me, my darling; be merciful!" she shrieked, and tried to embrace Marie.

In a sudden ebullition of disgust, for which she could not account to herself, Marie pushed the excited woman back; and then she realized that Emil was beside them; for meanwhile, at the President's request, he had come forward from his place behind Maître Barrot. She saw a look of horror on his face as he gazed at them both, the frantic girl and the frantic old woman who stood facing one another, both of exactly the same height; and suddenly she realized its meaning. She started in anger, yet her nausea gave way to a feeling of awe, and she felt

that this ravaged woman who had come to her to embrace her in such a moment had some sort of a right. . . . She had not the strength to oppose her when Mme de la Roncière threw herself upon her again. But an attendant led the uncontrolled, sobbing woman away, after a little white-haired gentleman, in the uniform of a lieutenant-general, had hurried up and separated her from Marie. This was the father; he hastily saluted M. de Morell and returned to his own place.

Marie was disenchanted and angered; she had no real sense of the nearness of La Roncière, who was now alone with her; he stood there waiting, a few paces from her, in a very plain tunic, and so composed that she herself seemed, and was, awkward.

Now then, would she say whether she recognized in the accused the person to whom she had referred in her depositions?

She looked up; she looked round; she glided up to Emil as though she had only just seen him and was compelled to examine him; she bent her head back, with a supple movement, and gazed up in his face—no, that was too bold; and now she stammered, as a wave of heat rushed over her. “How . . .” she managed to say—and then she made a

snatching movement with all her fingers—"how did you sleep?" And as the words escaped her she stretched and twisted her neck in distress. La Roncière narrowed his eyes with a frown, and turned away.

The President was satisfied, and wished to send him back to his place, but Maître Barrot rose and asked that he might for the moment be given a chair facing Mlle de Morell. He himself remained standing, while Marie sat down beside her father; and now he inquired for Mme de Morell. She, replied the President, was excused; she could not appear to-day on account of illness.

"That, too!" said Maître Barrot under his breath, but audibly; and M. de Morell drew his handkerchief from his sleeve, where he kept it, since he had continually to dry his forehead and wipe the perspiration from his eyes. His Eminence, however, the Cardinal, sitting in the family circle, deliberately, shuffling his feet, stretched out his round, red silken legs in front of him.

Maître Barrot began, without more ado, to bring together, as a preliminary to his speech for the defence, those statements or suggestions which were, he declared, contrary to reason and common sense.

This, he said, was unfortunately necessary, though it seemed to him an indignity to suggest such things to his audience in a serious argument. He spoke at first quietly:

“With the grossest absurdities I will not regale you yet again. Whether a sane man, in pursuance of a long-considered plan, would climb up to a first-story window with cloak and sabre; what the purpose of binding the young lady with a cord is supposed to have been; the childish wickedness of the adult letter-writer who appeals to the hatred of a mother for her daughter—to enter into all this is repugnant to me; it is all so crazy. However, I do now ask you to consider this: would any man of the least experience imagine that the servant of a rich and powerful family, who pay him well, and who can, on the other hand, ruin him, allow himself to be hired as accomplice in a crime against this family for the sum of five francs? And if my client can forge handwritings in so masterly a fashion that even the experts are unable to distinguish between the note in Mlle de Morell’s handwriting, which was enclosed in the letter to Captain d’Estange, and attested examples of her handwriting, why—ask yourselves this!—why, in the letter from Captain d’Es-

tange to the young lady, did he employ, not the Captain's handwriting, but his own, which was bound to convict him instantly? And, finally, we have been told of a furious assault, of kicks and bites and scratches, of an extreme and senseless frenzy. I ask you to look at this, I ask you to picture the proceedings to yourselves, and I ask you: did he spare the face? He did! Why did he spare it? I content myself with asking you!"

The effect of these intensely spoken words, which was still further heightened by the oratorical economy which Maître Barrot imposed upon himself, was unmistakable. It lifted La Roncière from his chair, and Marie imitated his movement, and, at the same time, drew nearer to him. She was feeling angry because the grimly staring clerk, of whom she once more felt afraid, was enjoying himself; she had noticed that all along; and it angered her so much—she did not know why—that she forgot everything. "But why did you confess, then?" she asked, rather shrilly, in the silence that had fallen; and she threw him a hasty glance. But having looked, she could not take her eyes off his face, for the smile that was passing over it, and colouring it, was excessively peculiar; there was actually a tiny little man there;

he clambered out of one eye, ran stamping over his cheeks, and crept in again at the other eye.

“Because I’m an inhuman brute,” he replied in a tone that was like an obeisance, and he held her gaze fast, and for a moment longer Marie held his; and the obeisance was continued in it. . . . Marie grasped at the air, and fell; the General was barely in time to catch her.

But now the attention of the court was diverted to old M. de la Roncière, who was thumping on the floor with his stick. His fragile figure was drawn up to its full height; his thin lips, on which lay bubbles of saliva, were moving silently. “Why confess?” he said violently, and suddenly his head and face flushed scarlet. “To spite me, to spite me. . . .” There he stood, in a peculiar attitude, with his foremost foot turned back until the toe touched the toe of his other foot, and he angrily shook his lifted stick, which he was grasping by the middle.

Now the accused was seen to recoil. As though to ward off a blow, he folded his hands, laying the finger-tips together, and, as though spell-bound, with a wry, distorted expression, he stared, with protruded lips, and stammered: “No. Don’t; please don’t!” Then he pressed the backs of his hands to

his forehead, while the President violently swung the bell and called upon the Advocate-General to plead.

M. de St. Omer waited condescendingly until all had recovered from the commotion caused by this ridiculous incident, and when he spoke his tone was condescending. It seemed as though he wished to imply, by his condescension, that there was really no need to waste any more words over the matter, and that he was speaking only as a matter of form. Such a crime, he insisted, deserved not only the full rigour of the law, but a public branding. For it was inherent in the secret character of the crime that it compelled its victim to be silent; and this, even in this case, doubtless explained the hesitation in proceeding openly against the person implicated. "It is only too true that the absurd prejudices of the world slander even the purest life, and threaten even the most undefiled innocence, if it ventures forth to make complaint and seek protection." And against this terrible inexorability, which had its roots in the very nature of mankind, it was of importance to set a warning example—and it could not be sufficiently deterrent—so that it would no longer be necessary for every mother to ask herself: "Am I safe even in my own house?" "Yet," he continued, "we must not

allow ourselves to be agitated"—and he slowly dropped his arms; "much rather have we need of moderation, in order that we may master and control our honest anger, for we ask for no verdict given in passion; we desire nothing but justice!" He proposed a sentence of ten years' imprisonment.

Then followed the address of Maître Oudard, who began by stating that he, too, proposed to be brief; he wished only to add a few supplementary remarks to the impressive exposition of the Advocate-General. He spoke in short truncated phrases; he bit off his sentences and seemed to spit them out, and this, in the long run, had a suggestive effect on his hearers; now, for the first time, one saw how he was working with Maître Oudard. He began by relating various incidents; for example, it showed the prisoner in a significant light that immediately after his arrival in Saumur he should have caused matrimonial discord between the hotel proprietor, Mortier, and his wife. For even though M. and Mme Mortier, having effected a reconciliation, were unwilling to make a deposition, yet the witness Jacquemin had seen him one day leave the dining-room and enter the offices of the hotel, a thing which an ordinary client would hardly think of doing.

But enough of this! And Maître Oudard, pumping his arms violently up and down, impressed upon the jurors the importance of their decision, which, in this case, must have the force of a lesson, for here the community itself was imperilled, for this was a matter affecting the general security, and not merely one domestic disaster. He was pleading the cause of a whole country, which awaited the verdict with tense anxiety. "In obedience to my name as a man, to my conscience as the father of a family, I cannot hesitate," he concluded. "Marie de Morell must not leave this court under the insult of any acquittal; and it must not be announced to the world that in the case of certain crimes an appeal to justice does not result in satisfaction, but rather in public dishonour! Gentlemen of the jury, you will know how to do your duty."

Maître Oudard, who was able, as a result of long experience, to measure, even as he resumed his seat, the impression which he had undoubtedly produced, now behaved as though he had not noticed that the doors of the court-room were being opened by the attendants, who were standing by them, and that a crowd of young men were pouring in; jurists who came to hear Barrot's concluding address. They took

their places at the back of the court, and immediately all was silent again.

But before Barrot rose the counsel for the manservant and the maid delivered a brief address on behalf of his clients. No one paid any attention to it, though he yelped, as was his habit.

Maître Barrot exchanged a few remarks with Emil, who had returned to his seat behind his counsel; then, slowly, he rose. He made absolutely no gestures; his body seemed to possess no arms, no hands; and thus he stood there, foursquare and homely, persuasion incarnate; only his lips worked, and the trumpet voice rose and fell. He said, addressing the bench and the jury:

“It is a time-honoured principle of the science of fortification that a sally is the best defence. And nevertheless I, who have devoted my whole life to the defence of innocent persons, of those who, according to my profoundest convictions, are calumniated and misguided, find myself to-day confronted for the first time by the necessity of the defensive offensive, that is, of accusation—and I shudder at the thought.

“Let me begin by a somewhat negative statement. It must have eluded you all that in this trial whose

issue is now before us, one figure has been completely absent, a figure which one might have expected as completely indispensable in this case; I mean the person who is commonly greeted with sceptical laughter by all the initiated—the mysterious *tertium quid*. Why is he absent? Gentlemen, he is absent, because he is always the result of logical deduction, and even when he is falsely interposed he cannot have any other genesis. But a healthy imagination refuses, when the demand is made upon it, to create an agent of a transaction when it is, so to speak, not worth its while to do so, because this transaction has no reality, but is absurd and inherently impossible. These are mysterious laws. There is no necessity for this third person, no inherent justification, and for this reason he does not appear. As for you, gentlemen, almost all that you need to do is to embody your conception of the figure of the perpetrator, and a living individual offers himself. And, moreover, it is in every way a happy choice. There is some idea that he might be ripe for retaliation; that some vague and long-past grievance might demand satisfaction. There are impressions which it is difficult to avoid, and which, therefore, are all the more easily awakened. Listen to your inmost prompt-

ings, gentlemen, and you will admit to me that you are tempted to revenge yourselves by punishing this *one* offence for the many that have gone before. I shall not insist on this point; you all are aware of your powers. But the reason why the incident, concerning which you have to give your verdict, is in itself so obscure that one has to revert to former incidents in order to find the presumptive perpetrator guilty, and why the convenient third party will not make his appearance, may be formulated in a single sentence: What was done, and the way in which it was done, was not like the work of a man! And yet it must have been done by a human being. . . .

“Gentlemen! The Inquisition used to act upon the principle that the more hideous a crime the less was the need of proof in judging it. To us to-day this point of view seems inconceivable, and yet involuntarily we act upon it so soon as we hear of such an incident, for example, as that with which we are now concerned. An unexampled act of cruelty, which seems to have been perpetrated on a weak and defenceless creature; in such a case everyone takes the side of the victim, and the more exalted our ideas, the blinder is our wrath. But you must not let yourselves be led astray by this anger, as M. l’Avocat-Général

has perhaps allowed himself to be led astray, even to the point of exclaiming that the whole Morell family might incur blame were my client to be acquitted. Nor must you give way before the blind opinion that surrounds you. This, in truth, is most essentially enjoined upon you, even if one requires nothing else of you. . . . In times past that may have been accounted as demoniac possession which I can but regard as the fiction of a sick imagination; but no matter; we feel only compassion—only compassion. You need not punish the guilty person; but—let the innocent one go free. We all know, gentlemen, after all, we all know, in the depths of our hearts . . .” He left the sentence unfinished, and the air seemed to quiver with its breaking; and then he began anew:

“Certain things need not be brought to light. Before the throne of that Judge Who awaits you also, and before Whom there is no darkness, your decision is long ago condemned if you abase yourselves to be the thralls of your own weakness, and long ago confirmed in so far as you are steadfast in honour. I need not, like Solon, let reason speak through madness. But to your reason, gentlemen, and to the coursing of your blood, the machine of justice is chained,

so that the pondering mind and the stream of life may enter it and control it, so that it shall not be the monstrous juggernaut it was of old. That is the great achievement of our age, the most precious freight with which we sail the sea of the centuries. But the ship, gentlemen, drifts to leeward in the darkness. Perhaps it is only a small component of the fleet that is entrusted to you as navigators. Nevertheless, you shall not leave it to the guidance of the spectre of bureaucratic equanimity; but rather gather about the tiller, and steer us back to the sunlit shore. Then you may fly from your topmast the banner on which the finger of a god has written: 'To the honour of the human race!' "

Maître Barrot sat down. La Roncière leaned forward and seized his two hands. There was a burst of approving applause. The President suffered it; he himself was impressed; and this was evident from the tenor of his words to La Roncière.

"Defendant," he said, "your defender spoke of God. Before the gentlemen of the jury withdraw it is my duty to ask you whether you have still anything further to say. Defendant, I ask it in the presence of our God! Answer me!" And he held up the crucifix before him.

Emil stood like a tower. It was as though he had pulled down his vizor, and was alone behind it, alone with himself; the burning glances recoiled from his armour; all but those of two eyes, but even they were only like two darts that stuck quivering in his vizor. He saw nothing but the back of Maître Barrot, and he was grateful to him for his immobility. Suddenly he thought of the kindly commandant in Cayenne who had spoken of "children of fate." There he stood now, like the statue of a child of fate. . . . And what if the statue took a hammer from his pocket, ay, or from his mouth, and shattered the poor human skull? There would be one gasp from all these constricted throats. And if one simply went on, sitting or standing, always as silent as one was at this moment, through all the teeming hours, until the very last of them all had struck—what then? Perhaps that was all just a matter of making up one's mind. . . .

"Answer me!"

Obstinate . . . obstinate.

The President raised his shoulders and his eyebrows. Nevertheless, he impressed it on the jury that any least uncertainty in their minds must speak in favour of the defendant.

While the jury were deliberating Emil was taken

to a waiting-room near the advocates' room. He began at once to pace to and fro. On a chair against the bare wall sat Annette, and Ambert had taken up his position in one corner, with an angry face, as he himself was aware. "This is dreadful!" he whispered to Maître Barrot, as the latter entered the room.

La Roncière broke into inconsiderate laughter. "He finds everything dreadful that he doesn't understand!" he said.

He went up to Annette, lifted her head, and pressed it down again. And so she sat, with her head bowed. But the next time he came her way he stopped again, and, with abstracted fingers, he smoothed and tidied her hair. Then he snatched back his hands and resumed his wandering. For a time they heard him talking, under his voice, with the gendarme, who was an old soldier. Then he left him and went to the window and looked out, and listened to the confused hum of voices in the court. Then once more he began to wander about the room.

His father had sent word that he could not possibly come; his mother was detaining him. And he really was desperately busy, correcting and apologizing for the things that his wife, who was quite out of hand, was telling a swarm of reporters as she

walked up and down the wide outer corridor. The dupe of any compassionate phrase, she was bubbling over with information: all about Emil's youth, his character, his parents, his career. She was transfigured. The General, on the other hand, no longer knew whom he ought to keep away from her, and whom he ought to detain until he himself had spoken to him. These gentlemen were frigid, but they were persevering, since the other side had completely withdrawn itself.

Marie was lying wretchedly on two chairs that had been placed together; she had been overcome by an attack of weakness, from which she had not yet recovered. M. de Morell was holding one icy hand. With the thumb-knuckle of the other hand she tapped and tapped on her clenched teeth. Nothing would induce her to go home. With the exception of Maître Oudard, who was growing more impatient every moment, who felt that his confidence was here misplaced, yet could not bring himself to go, there was no one in the little room.

Outside, the Morell's relatives were grouped in front of their semicircle of chairs; they seemed to be lazily chatting; they were helping one another to disregard the clamour in the court-room, where fat and

flabby faces were contending, and chivalrous and spiteful tongues were busy, while in the midst of it all indifference wagged its head. Originally in silent agreement, they had not even left their seats. They wanted to give the impression that in their opinion the verdict would be delivered immediately, since there was really nothing to be debated.

But it was a full hour before the jury returned. Almost simultaneously the defendant was brought in, and all took their places in a moment, and were silent, while the judges covered their heads.

Then the foreman of the jury—he was very pale—read out the verdict: by a majority of seven votes La Roncière had been found guilty of attempted rape against Marie de Morell, which had failed only by reason of circumstances independent of the will of the perpetrator; also, that he had deliberately inflicted the wounds found upon her; on the other hand, he was acquitted of the charge that these wounds had resulted in an illness; in conclusion, the plea of mitigating circumstances was found to be justified.

Samuel Bonnie and Sophie Génier were acquitted for lack of evidence.

The judges were soon in agreement. They sentenced La Roncière to four years' imprisonment, but

without exposure in the pillory; and to bear the costs of the trial, and to pay damages.

At the mention of mitigating circumstances La Roncière had reared himself up. The whole court, standing, gazed at him expectantly. And for the first time he shouted in a hollow voice:

“All that is like a mouthful of filth. But you up there, you don’t know, ah, you don’t know what a pleasure it is to wrench such a fang out of a grinning jaw!” And imperiously he made a gesture as though he were tearing a slat out of a fence. “Such a thing turns one’s heart upside down. There you have the old La Roncière! I know people think me a rebel. Do your utmost, gentlemen; no one can be robbed of the right to think! Do your utmost! I can die, too, alone!”

He was taken away.

MAÎTRE BARROT, for what he was worth, followed him into the cell. But Emil was in no need of support. Almost gaily he crossed the little room, snatched at the advocate's hand, and pressed it again and again. Maître Barrot let him do it, and gazed at him; for the moment he found nothing to say.

Then: "Why?" he asked. "Now, at all events, when all is over. Tell me. Can it have been defiance?"

"Oh, but Maître Barrot!" He swung aside, then checked himself. "I believe, really, that you have outwardly what I have within me," he said earnestly. "Perhaps that has to come with the years, and your profession; forgive my saying so. But you are not to leave me with the feeling that you have wasted your efforts; and I can see that you must feel that." He strode to and fro, considering.

"Above all, there is one thing of which you have formed a false opinion," he began gradually. "You have believed all along that I want to spare someone. But that isn't the case at all, and for that reason everything's all right. For a long time," he continued, "I myself didn't know why I had confessed. Fever, and consideration for my father—of course, one can put it down to that—but it wasn't really for that. I have racked my brains over it enough, and then suddenly it came to me. Look: what you wanted to persuade me to, that was honestly the way to save me. Annette told me about that night, and you about last night, only this morning. And now I can at last understand; that was the very thing I'd been longing for, Maître Barrot," and he clenched his hands

together and bowed himself over them. "In that you brought me what I'd been searching for all the time: the meaning! the confirmation! She wanted to confess—and I blocked the way; she wanted to get free of her own soul, and to me alone, in the whole world, was given the power to permit her to do so. Suddenly I knew what was the meaning of it all. He placed the power of punishment in my hands; that was enough for me; that was how it was meant, and so it's all right, Maître Barrot. For 'God'—that means simply that it's all right."

He was silent, with his face half averted. Maître Barrot did not move; he seemed to be waiting for something more.

"Perhaps you don't find that impressive," said Emil more temperately. "For me, at all events, it was salvation. Consider for a moment what one easily forgets: the person concerned is, after all, a stranger; I have only seen her twice. But this much one has to recognize: she is not simply an odious and calamitous female. You wanted to stamp her as such—but she's not that! She's not that; she has surely that within her that will consume her, and every day that I shall spend in prison I shall be adding to it; but what have I to regret?" he cried, and flung out

his arms. "No one knows better than I what that does to one—to be unable to come out with the truth—not at any price between heaven and earth! May she only live to see the end of it! I won't allow myself to curse her. She is capable of dying of it, believe me, Maître Barrot; I can see that; believe that it is so, and let me believe in God!"

Maître Barrot gazed at the wall and nodded. "To be sure," he said, as though in conclusion. "Thank you; thank you."

He lifted the latch of the door. "I am coming back," he said. They went out; the warder stood in the corridor some distance from the door. Maître Barrot smiled a hesitating smile. "They don't defend her badly, the stranger," he said. Emil looked at him in perplexity, and said nothing.

Then she stood before him, she of whom they were speaking.

Her breath came and went in panting jerks. There was an animal warmth about her; her eyes and her waxen fingers were frenzied: Emil must stop; Emil must listen.

"You mustn't believe that—that I am so little—that I shan't die of this."

He had gripped at her head with both his out-

stretched hands. He pressed them upon her temples till she bent backwards. He looked over her head; he sang through his clenched teeth: "No! Surely no! I do not believe that!" He pressed still harder; Marie slipped away; her face flushed a glimmering yellow; his was mottled with red when he released her.

She stumbled against the wall, and quickly slipping along it she was lost in the distance of the corridor.

Emil's chest was heaving as he gazed after her.

"They'll be burying her soon," said Ambert behind him.

He flung himself round. At first it seemed that he was going to kiss the little man; but he only seized him as he had seized Marie, and between tears and ecstasy:

"Now surely I know," he said, between his teeth, "that the heavens are not empty."

THE END

AFTERWORD

SINCE I was enabled to follow the genesis of this book from its inception, I, more than anyone, am in a position to make a few observations of a technical and psychological nature. How I came by this right to stand sponsor for it is another story: quite literally another story, for I have felt impelled to make a

record of the not uninteresting history of my relation to Hans Aufricht-Ruda, for myself, for him, and for my other friends, though, indeed, in a veiled form, as is proper to so esoteric a matter. Of the technique of the book I need say little. In a language very personal to the author, with the integrity and certainty of the true stylist, together with an external coolness and taciturnity which allows the warmth of the heart to blaze out only in the persons of the drama, but not, after the usual fashion of the dilettante, in the recital itself, an adventure is related, stroke by stroke, with unerring hand (a rare quality in conjunction with the youth which the author is so fortunate as to possess), which, in its progress and its content, is as typical and dateless as its figurative representation is characteristic and singular. It has all the qualities which an exigent reader has the right to demand, if he is not to regard the time even given to the reading of a book as wasted; it offers a changing picture of a certain section of the world and society, a particular pattern of life and intellect and morality, and develops it with a restraint that evokes curiosity and tense anticipation, and with a freedom that elicits confidence, and of which even the unsophisticated reader will be able to form his opinion;

and I for one should be sorry if he did not agree with me.

As regards the adventure itself, we have here, in its outlines and in its central motive, an historic fact, a legal action which in its day made a great sensation, and which had given both jurists and laymen much cause for thought and for debate. I mention this expressly, because critical pens and inquiring experts will not fail to call attention to the fact. We Germans, indeed, are in such matters extremely conscientious, or, shall I say, timid? Or is it that we suffer from a sort of lust for specialization, a specialistic jealousy?

History is history; criminology is criminology; life is life; poetry and narrative are again things set apart, and if the poet appropriates a given reality this will not be ceded to him undiluted and intact. This, to a certain extent, diminishes his authority. As though it were the given reality that mattered, and not—as it does in a much greater degree—what it becomes in the hand of him who shapes it, ennobles it, and gives it eternal significance. We can never find, in this reality, the man and his mysterious inner self, his hidden motives, the root of his behaviour, the true nature of his passions; nor his gestures, nor

his features; only the crude aspect of his actions, and the final sum to be deduced from the external catastrophe. What matters, and matters exclusively, is man and his soul. What pretext is employed I care not, so that I see, as a result, the man, the created man. I want to be able to conjecture him, to recognize him; he shall expound to me my own nature, and help to elucidate the difficult and mysterious paths that are trodden by "real" human beings also.

Here, then, is the Marie Morell of this book; she is such a creation, and therefore she makes me, too, a creator. And I cannot finish her and put her aside, although the author has given us a complete representation, absolutely complete, clear and precise, visible and palpable (and in his power of making visible the physical peculiarities, the miming and gesturing of his creatures, he reveals a power and truth of hallucination at which I must marvel); it is only that he does not elucidate her for me, does not comment upon her, does not analyse her, which, of course, it is not in the least his business to do, since she does indeed exist, and in breathing life into her he has already done enough for me. It is for me to rack my brains over the problem of what is the

matter with her, and what her motives are; I must get at her secret for myself. Is she, in conventional language, actually a good or a bad character? I do not know; I am not clear on the point. What she did was truly not a pleasant thing. The whole affair of the forged letters does not precisely point to a harmless soul; an angel of innocence would not conceive the idea of employing such an infamous expedient in order to satisfy her longing to kindle a man's love for her by means of a criminal fiction. The Baroness does one day hint that in her opinion Marie is bad; there is something singularly depressing and somewhat mysterious in the relations of mother and daughter, and Mme de Morell has sufficient reasons, since her relations to the world of humanity are, after all, of the utmost fragility, to protect her only surviving child from the assaults of her inner despair. I do not believe that Marie is bad, still less is she malicious, however treacherous her charm and however incomprehensible her whole character may often appear: a mixture of delicate greed and tragic caprice. The expert psychiatrist would say: well, here is a classified case of feminine hysteria. Everything is in accordance with this: the virtuosity and boldness in lying, the frequent and violent revulsions of mood,

the demonic faculty of assimilating her physical condition to conditions which are merely imagined, so that even the eye of the physician is deceived. But softly, gentlemen—the matter is not so simple as this. Let us read between the lines a little. Although I do not deny that we have here a morbid condition—if you will, a psychosis—depicted by a hand that has almost the skill of a specialist, yet the clinical situation is only the actual pretext for a profounder drama in the background. For Marie Morell is not merely the victim of a chance entanglement; swept along in the same direction as that “child of fate,” La Roncière, she is surrendered to fate, and, indeed, as between her and fate all freedom of will is excluded from the outset, and she is nothing more and nothing less than the creature of the phantasy which in her makes its appearance as an elementary force, and operates with all the violence of an element, so that the walls of convention are broken down, and her reason has no longer time to make a pact with her imagination and her dream. Such a nature, wrested from the logic of events and the law of cause and effect, must of necessity spread disaster and destruction around it, and we could no more sympathize with Marie Morell than we could sym-

pathize with a cyclone or a pestilence, did she not finally accept all the consequences of her act and stake her person and her life, and more than this she could not reasonably do, to restore the moral order of the world to equilibrium and to take upon herself the full measure of expiation which we are compelled to demand of her. Here, on the cross-roads of fate, of her fate and La Roncière's, there are two significant moments which profoundly impressed me, both in reading the book aloud and in reading it to myself; one is the moment of her prayer in the church, when she addresses the Madonna with the words: "Oh, how I wish you were really here!" and one the moment of her meeting with La Roncière, after he has been sentenced, when she says to him: "You mustn't believe that I am so little that I shan't die of this." For now, indeed, he has conquered, this man possessed with the idea of justice, and a more glorious conquest he could hardly desire; and when he cries out: "Now surely I know that the heavens are not empty" we, too, know this at last; now we are truly at one with him; for we have not always quite understood him; but now we understand him, for this cry is a beacon which lights his way hither from the beginning, and therewith he

enters into the ranks of those figures with whom it is worth while to live.

JACOB WASSERMANN.

ALTAUSSEE,

December, 1926

250 .

. 254

